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ARIADNÈ

THE STORY OF A DREAM.

By OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF "PUCK," "SIGNA," "TRICOTRIN," "TWO LITTLE
WOODEN SHOES," ETC.

"La forza d'Amore non risguarda al delitto."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ARIADNÈ:

THE STORY OF A DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

So the months passed by and became years, fulfilling their course with that terrible speed which sows the earth so thick with graves.

I stitched on for the people of Rome, and the people said "he grows old; he has no sport in him; let him be;" and very often therefore passed me by to hurry to another stall before the old stone mouth of Truth, where there was a newly-come cobbler of leather who had a very comical wit and had very cheap prices; I do not

know whether his work wore well. But I made enough to live on and get bread for Pâles. That sufficed.

Very often I would go and look at my lost Hermès in the gallery of the Vatican. I might as well never have sold him ; but we know everything too late.

And when the gaping foreign crowds, all frothy talk, and not a shred of knowledge or of reverence amidst them, gathered round the pedestal he stood on, and praised him, I wanted to cry out to them, “Stand aside, ye fools—he is mine.”

But he was not mine any more.

Sometimes I used to wonder, would she be sorry if she knew that I had lost him ?

But no doubt he was better there, and more fittingly in place with the Jupiter Anxur in the palace of the Pope. I had never been great enough for him ; I had only loved him, and what use is that ?

Time wore away, I say, and took the days and the weeks and the months, and Rome was swept with the by-winds of winter and scorched with the sand-blasts of the summer, and its travertine

and its porphyry, and its old brick that has the hues of porphyry, were transfigured into matchless glory with every sun that set ; and my Ariadnê came thither no more.

Where was she ? I knew not. She was not forsaken, since Maryx stayed on in the city always, and I knew well that he would not forget that unuttered oath by the Cross.

He was shut for ever in his room at work, they said. To my sight, all the greatness had gone out of his work. But the world did not see this. Before a great fame the world is a myope.

The cunning of his hand, and the force of it, and the grace, were all there as of old, of course ; for the consummate artist, by long mastery of his art, does acquire at last what is almost a mechanical aptitude, and can scarcely do ill, so far as mere form goes, even working with blind eyes. But the soul of all art lies in the artist's own delight in it ; and that was now lacking forever in his. These things that he created had no joy for him.

Men and women, losing the thing they love, lose much, but the artist loses far more ; for

him are slaughtered all the children of his dreams, and from him are driven all the fair companions of his solitude.

Maryx laboured by day and by night in his house upon the Golden Hill ; but it was labour, it was no more creation, and the delight of creation. He worked from habit, from pride, to save himself perhaps from madness ; for there is no friend or physician like work ; but his old mother had said rightly—he was like a dead man. He had never spoken any word to me of Giojà since that night in the amphitheatre. Indeed, I saw him but seldom. I felt that my presence was pain to him, and I felt remorse. Why had I compelled Fortune and brought this evil upon him in the midst of his lofty, peaceful, and victorious life ? We are sorry meddlers, and play with Fate too much.

He had never reproached me ; but for that very forbearance my own conscience but rebuked me the more.

One day I met him in the park of the Pamfili Doria : they are very grand and lovely, these woods, with their slopes of grass that are

like the moorlands of the north, and their old gnarled oaks, and their emporpled hoards of violets, that are so many that you cannot tread there a step in winter without crushing half a hundred little fragrant hooded heads.

I had gone on an errand with a gardener's hobnailed shoes ; he was walking against the wind, as men walk who would escape from ghosts that will keep pace with them, ghosts that the sunlight never scares away.

He almost struck against me as he passed, and, pausing, recognised me.

It was twilight in a wintry eve ; the sea-breeze was sweeping keen and cold through the branches of the pines ; the swans and the statues by the water's edge looked chill and shadowy ; the bold uplands of the shelving turf were crisp with glistening frost ; the owls were hooting.

He looked at me in the sad twilight which lasts but such a little moment here in Rome.

“It is you !” he said with a gentle voice. “My old friend, have I been neglectful of you or unkind ? I have not seen you for

so long. But if there be anything you ever want of me——”

“Nay, there is nothing,” I said to him. “And we only hurt one another. We both are waiting——”

Then I stopped, afraid that I should wound him; for he was very proud in some things.

“Come home with me now,” he said abruptly, taking no notice of my last words. “Come home with me. You shall see my work. Rome holds no better critic.”

Then he turned, and we went downwards through the park, under the broad branches of the ilexes, and the owls flapped in our faces, and the darkness fell, and the swans went off the water to their nests amongst the reeds; and we walked together through the gates and to his own house, which was not far distant, and where I had never been since the day that I had seen the copy of the *Nausicaa* shattered on the floor.

The place was almost dark. We entered his studio and he struck a light, and I began to see the glimmer of the marbles and the plaster’s

whiteness. We had walked quite in silence ; what could we say to one another, he and I ?

He drew the shrouding cloths off a great group, and the lights from above fell on it.

Its name matters nothing ; it stands to-day before the senate-house of a great nation ; it was a composition from the heroic ages. It was majestic, pure, and solemn ; there was not a false line in it nor a weak one ; it had the consummate ease and strength that only the trained hand of a perfect master can command ; yet——

What was lacking in it ?

It was hard to tell. But it was lifeless. It was work, composition, not art. It was like a dead body from which the soul has fled. I looked at it in silence.

“ Well ? ” he asked, and watched my face. Then, before I could measure my words to tell the truth, yet veil it, he, scanning my face, read my mind and cast the cloths back again and laughed aloud ; a laugh that I can hear still when I sit and think and the night is quiet.

“ Ah, it does not deceive you any more than me ! You see it aright. It is imposture. It will

cheat the world. It cannot cheat you or me. It is a lie. Look at it; it is the first thing I ever sold to any man that has no shadow of myself put into it, no beauty in my sight, no preciousness or gladness for me, no thought or soul of mine blent with it to make it as strong and holy as a man's labours can be. It is a lie. It is not art; it is cold, hard, joyless, measured, mechanical—like any stone creature that the copyist sits and chips from some plaster model of the galleries, and calls a god! I always thought so, felt so. Who knows our work as we, the makers, do? And now I am certain, looking on your face. Hush! Do not speak. Tell me no lies. The thing is lie enough."

I was silent.

It was of no use to seek to foist on him the empty phrases of an artificial compliment; he would have seen through them and despised me.

The light from above fell on the half-shrouded group and on his face; his eyes had a terrible anguish in them, such as one could picture in a wounded lion's that feels his mighty strength ebbing away and cannot rise again.

The lamp that he held he dashed upon the floor ; the flame was extinguished on the stone.

“Look at that light !” he said. “A moment, less than a moment, and it is quenched—just falling ; that is the light in us, who think ourselves the light of the world. One blow, and we are in darkness for ever. We make Zeus in rage, and Christ with pity ; we should make them both only laughing ; any god must laugh. Look ! men have called me great, and stronger than most of them I may have been ; and they will go on calling me great and great everything that I do, sheerly from habit’s sake, and the force of memories, and the imitation of numbers. But for me, I know very well I shall never be great any more. The cunning may stay in my hand, but the soul is gone out of my body, and the art in me is dead. I am an artist no more. No more !”

He was silent a little while, gazing out through the unshuttered windows into the starless night ; the quenched lamp lay at his feet.

“Look !” he said suddenly, all the long-imprisoned suffering of so many months of silence

breaking loose like a river long pent-up and breaking its banks. “Look! From a little lad, all I cared for was art. Going behind my mule over the stony ground, I saw only the images I had seen in the churches and the faces of the gods and the saints. Starving and homeless in Paris, I was happy as a bird of the air, because the day showed me beautiful shapes, and by night in sleep I saw lovelier still. When fame came to *mé*, and the praises of men and their triumphs, I was glad because by such means I could give my years to the studies I loved, and the visions of my brain in palpable form to the people. Never once was I proud with the pride of a fool; but I was glad—ah, God! I was glad. The stubborn stone obeyed me, submissive as a slave; I delighted in my strength; I knew my mastery; my labour was beautiful to me, and waking I thought of it and went to it as to the sweetest mistress that could smile on earth. When one loves an art, it is the love of the creator and of the offspring both in one; it is the joy of the lover and of the child; when it fails us, what can the whole world give? And now in me it is dead—dead—

dead. I care for the marble no more than the workman that hews it for daily bread. It says nothing to me now. It is blank and cold, and I curse it. I shall never make it speak any more. I am palsied before I am old!"

Then his head drooped upon his breast ; he dropped down on the bench beside him, and covered his face with his hands.

He had forgotten that I was there.

I went away in silence and left him, not to see a great man weep.

What comfort could one give to him ?

Verily the sculptures of the Greeks were right. Love burns up the soul.





CHAPTER II.

DAYS and weeks and months went by, for time devours so fast. It was again full summer—the fierce fair summer of the south, and I was sitting vacantly one night by the stall, with the lamp swinging on its cord above my head, and the din of the laughter, and the swish of the oars in the water, and the light low chords of the twanging guitars, and the merry steps of the young men and maidens on the bridge, all sounding discordant and hateful on my ears, as they had always in the old time sounded welcome and musical ; and this, I do think, as I have said before, is one of the unkindest things of sorrow, that it makes us almost loathe the gay and innocent mirth of others.

I was sitting so, I say, with the moonlight all

silvery about my feet, and the people around me dancing our beautiful native saltarello, that, since the foreigners have come in such shoals, our lads and lasses have grown almost ashamed of, learning to jig and jump instead, with no more grace than the stranger from over sea: for want of grace is progress too, it seems. And now, being summer, there were no foreigners to look on and make them blush for being graceful, so they danced that perfect dance in the space betwixt the fountain and the street, and I sat aloof and weary in the moonlight, with the sound of the tambourines thumping through my brain.

Suddenly a hand fell on my shoulder. It was that of Maryx.

“ I am going away. Here I shall lose my brain before I lose my life. When one is strong, one does not die. You have seen—I am like a paralytic. Perhaps travel may do something. You will not speak of me. Go and visit my mother. I shall be away till I feel some force to work, or until——”

He did not end his phrase, but I understood it as it stood. He meant until he heard that she

had been forsaken. I could say nothing to him. I knew that he was no longer himself.

He looked at my Apollo Sandaliarius, the little white figure that he had sculptured in the days of his youth, when he had been a lustrous-eyed, eager-limbed lad, filled with a noble and buoyant fervour of life, and that faith in his own strength which compels the destiny it craves.

A great anguish came into his eyes.

“ Ah ! to go back five-and-twenty years ;— who would not give his very soul to do it ! Well, I have all I wished for then ; and what use is it ? ”

Then, as if ashamed, he paused, and added, in a colder, calmer voice,—

“ I cannot tell where I may go—the east, most likely. Comfort my mother. You are a good man. Farewell, my friend.”

He pressed my hand, and left me.

The sky seemed emptier, the world seemed greyer, than before. But he did wisely to go—that I knew. Here, inaction and the desperate pain of failing force would gnaw at his very vitals, till he would curse himself and weep

before the genius of his own works, as did your northern Swift. For there can be nothing so terrible as to see your soul dead, whilst yet your body still lives.

So I was left alone in the city, and the days and weeks and months crept slowly on ; “ ohne Hast, ohne Rast,” as the German says of the stars. Only, when one has neither the eager joy of haste, nor the serene joy of rest, life is but a poor and wearisome thing that crawls foot-sore, like a galled mule on a stony way.

The mother of Maryx, left all alone on the Golden Hill, did not murmur ; she understood few things, but she understood why he was gone.

“ I always said that it would be so. I always said it,” she muttered, with her feeble hands feeling the wooden cross at her neck, that she had worn ever since her first communion, when she had been a little bright brown-eyed girl, no doubt, clanking in her wooden shoes over the sunburnt fields. “ You see, because he had mastered that wicked thing so long, and struck it and hewn it into any shape he chose, and

made a slave of it, he thought it never could harm him ; but I knew. His father used to laugh and say, ‘ How can it hurt me ? It is I who hurt it, hewing it out of its caverns, and breaking it up into atoms.’ But all the same, one day it had its revenge—and crushed him. He was only a common rough hewer of stone. Oh, I know ! And my son is great, and a kind of king in his way ; but it is all the same—the marble does not forgive. It bides its time, then it strikes in its turn.”

And she accepted what it had brought her, with the kind of numbness of mingled despair and patience which is the peasant’s form of resignation to the will of God. In her fancy, the marble never forgave its masters ; in mine, I thought, “ what art ever forgives its followers, when they open their eyes to behold any beauty outside its own ? ”

Love art alone, forsaking all other loves, and she will make you happy, with a happiness that shall defy the seasons and the sorrows of time, the pains of the vulgar and the changes of fortune, and be with you day and night, a light

that is never dim. But mingle with it any human love—and art will look for ever at you with the eyes of Christ when he looked at the faithless follower as the cock crew.





CHAPTER III.

THUS time went on, and the old woman span her flax in the beautiful house on the hill, and grew feebler and a little blind ; and I, down in my corner by the fountain, worked for my bread in torrid summers and in icy winters, and grew gloomy, they said, and pleased but few ; and my neighbours said, “ what did it matter to you ? — to you nothing happened. It was not as if she had been your daughter.”

And, indeed, nothing had happened to me, of course ; only all the simple pleasures of life were dead and gone, and the wrinkled faces of the old manuscripts said nothing to me, and the spell of the arts for me was broken ; and I should have cared nothing though my foot had

laid bare all the jewels of the Faustines, or the lost Cupid of Praxiteles.

For a great sorrow is like that subtle poison which is carried by a carrion-fly in summer, and the paralysis of it runs through all the nerves, and the nearest and the most distant are alike stricken and numb.

It is murder to take life ; but perhaps to take away all the joy of life is a more cruel thing, in real truth.

How was it with her ? Was the false and faithless joy that had allured her gone from her ? Was she left alone ?

I sat and wondered, till the sunlight on the stones seemed to scorch my eyes blind, and the sweet noise of the falling water sounded hideous.

Rome is so beautiful when it lies under the splendour of its heavens of light ; but it had ceased to be anything to me save a prison that held my body, while my sick soul was far away over strange lands, seeking—seeking—

I had little hope that he would be faithful to her, or merciful in any way ; yet sometimes I fancied that such perfect love from her, and her

entire innocence of evil, and her many high and rare gifts, might so gain even on him, that it would not be quite with her as it had been with others. So I fancied, hoping against hope, and sitting stitching by my old place under the shadow of the old ecclesiastical walls.

Hilarion came no more to Rome.

It was not fear that kept him away ; he was one of the boldest of men. It was, probably, that dislike to moral pain, and instinctive avoidance of it, which were very strong in his temperament. It was also, perhaps, some pang of conscience ; for his conscience was always fully awake to the evil he did, and the worst thing in him was that, knowing it, he deliberately selected it. But then, indeed, to him and to his school there is no clear right and no clear wrong in anything. All men were irresponsible in his sight, being born without any will of their own, and all adrift in a chaotic darkness that had no beginning or end.

Hilarion came no more to Rome, and the beauty of Daïla was wasted on the empty air and on the peasants, who had no eyes to behold

it, but only saw the locust on the wheat-stalk, the beetle in the vine-leaf, the fever mist in the reedy places by the rivers, and all the other sore and various curses of their daily lives.

If any asked for news of him there, they always said that they knew nothing. Perhaps it was true. Hilarion was one of those who have many houses in many lands, but have no home.

They are common in your generation.

Of little Amphion, also, I had seen no more since that fatal night.

All about me the life was unchanged. My neighbours gambled at trisella and zecchinetto as of old ; Ersilia scolded and laboured, with a wrinkle the more betwixt her black brows ; Pippo cooked, and Pipistrello played ; and the youngsters skipped upon the stones to the twanging of lute and viol and the thump of tambourine ; and the nightingales sang in the gardens ; and the goats rang their bells with early daylight down the streets.

But to me all the world seemed dead—dead as Nero's slaughtered millions were beneath the soil.

A year had gone by since Maryx had left Rome, and it was summer again—full summer, with all the people going out, in merry honest fooling, to the country ; and the lusty-lunged reapers coming through the streets all the night long; singing, with the tasselled corn in their hair, and the poppies behind their ears.

Ah, the poppies !—Love's gift.

When I saw them I grew more heart-sick than before, and all the loud sonorous reaping-songs beat on my ears with a stupid hateful sound.

One night they came by me over the bridge, louder and more mirthful than ever, and the girls of our streets were dancing the saltarella with some young fisher-fellows from the boats below, and all of a sudden the harmless, noisy joyousness of it all smote me so sharply that I could not bear it any longer, and I rose up and walked away.

All the day long, and some time before, I do not know why it was, but a sudden restlessness had seized on me, and that kind of feeling of something strange about me which one has at

times ; nervous depression, wise men say, and weak men call such things presentiments.

I felt a loathing of those blithe guitars and shaking tambourines, and handsome maidens ; I rose and called Palès, and strolled away in the white still night along the familiar ways. By night Rome is still a city for the gods ; the shadows veil its wounds, the lustre silvers all its stones ; its silence is haunted as no other silence is ; if you have faith, there where the dark gloss of the laurel brushes the marble as in Agrippa's time, you will see the Immortals passing by chained with dead leaves and weeping. In earlier days I had seen them ; days when no human affection chained my thoughts to earth : now I went over the stones bent and blind, and only thinking—thinking—thinking—when we can only think and cannot dream, then truly we are old.

I went along through the Forum, and past the arch of Trajan, and through Constantine's, out on that broad road between the mulberry trees, with the ruins of the innumerable temples standing everywhere amidst the fields and gardens, the reaped corn and the ripening cherries.

The road curves to the left, as everyone knows, and goes to the baths of the poor madman, Caracalla; and there are shapeless mounds of brick and stone and rubble everywhere amongst the turf and the tilled soil, and you know that they were all sacred one day, and beautiful, with domes and porticoes, and columns and high springing arches, and thronging multitudes worshipping in them, and the smoke of sacrifice ascending, and the great statues standing with serene faces immutable and calm amidst the uproar of emotion and of prayer.

The night was still and luminous; a million stars were shining in the violet blue above; all was quiet, with only the sound of hooting owls that flew from the looming mass of the Flavian theatre behind me in the dark. I thought of the broad burning noons, of the gathered people, of the knife of the priest, of the fall of the ox, of the fountain of blood, of the frenzy of death, of the worship of Attis, of all that came with the accursed eastern races to ruin Rome with its lusts.

I thought and shuddered and went on and

forgot them : what mattered the fall of the gods or the nations ?—I had not been able to keep pure and in safety one short human life.

It was midsummer time, and the scents of the land were all sweet and heavy about me, the reaped wheat leaned against the broken altar, and the cut clover was piled by the forsaken lararia ; the air was alight and alive with fireflies, and the crickets alone answered the owls singing amongst the stalks of the corn.

The mighty red masses of the baths rose in sight ; they were not red now, but brown and grey, stripped of their marbles, and bare in the moonlight, with the bushes blowing on their summits, and the many things that only venture forth by night, creeping over the mosaic floors that once had felt so many million soft, white, useless feet glistening with the unguents and the perfumes there.

In that warm summer night the scents of the innumerable bird-sown plants and flowers were sweet upon the night as ever was the stream of fragrance poured over patrician limbs in these recesses, now so dark and drear and given over

to the stoat and the newt, in that eternal irony of mortal fame which seems always to laugh aloud through Rome.

It was a hiding-place for thieves in that time, but I could have no fear, I, old and poor, without a coin of value on me. I walked through it, unthinking; thinking only of that long-abiding sorrow which had fallen upon me and others because I had meddled with the great goddess of Præneste.

Now at that time the place was perilous and quite unguarded; beggars slept there, and thieves also if they chose, and so it was not strange that away from the broad moonlight, just where the mosaic pavement slopes down under the fragment of marble cornice in the central hall, there were rough work and some evil thing being done: there was an old man being held and searched by two sturdy half-clad rogues.

I was old too, but very strong, and I had my knife; the thieves were but two; they fled without my touching them, thinking the guards were behind me—fled, and having no wound worse than that from Palès' sharp teeth. The old man mut-

tered many curses and few blessings ; he had been robbed of a few copper coins ; he was very poor, he said ; looking in his haggard face I saw that he was the old man, Ben Sulim, of the Ghetto.

I gave him back his curses, and set him with his face to the moonlight, and bade him be gone.

Then he would have thanked me, but I strode away from him out over the vineyards where there used to be all those open marble courts for the Romans' sports and daily gossiping ; a hare ran before me into a sheaf of corn, a broad-winged owl flew slowly like a puff of smoke borne on a slow wind ; they were all that held the place of the Roman people now.

I walked homeward by many a mile across the pale campagna, sweet with flowering thyme, and rife with fever, and backward into Rome by way of the Lateran church and palace : it was full dawn when I reached my stall and slept. I thought no more of the accident of the night : save now and then I wished I had not meddled with the thieves.

It was far into the vintage month, and the first

dreariness of rain was falling, when a messenger came to me from the Fiumara, and bade me, as a good and Christian man, go down into the Ghetto to see a dying man who asked for me. At first I would not go ; then thought of her and went : heaven forgive me for such hardness of soul ! Before death all men have title to our help.

I went, indeed I hastened, for I knew not what it might not bode for her ; but with all my haste I was too late : my momentary hardness and reluctance had made me too late : the old man was in the agonies of death when I climbed to his wretched door, and though his sunken eyes looked at me with pain, he could not speak, and in a few seconds more his last breath passed his lips.

It was in squalor, nakedness, and misery that he died ; died, indeed, they said, rather of want of food, and from unnatural deprivations of all kinds, than of any malady.

Yet there was a notary waiting there ; and when he, indeed, lay stark and lifeless and grey in death's rigidity upon the planks of his miserable bed, the man said, softly—for men who are

not reverent of death are reverent of wealth—
“ He was the richest man in Ghetto.”

And thus it proved.

What he would have said to me, no man could tell; but by all the people round him his large possessions had been long suspected.

The Syrian Jew had died as so many a miser has died in this world, a starved and wretched skeleton, but leaving a mass of wealth behind him, and no word of any kind to will it, for death had come upon him unawares, and no doubt like all men whose treasures lie in things of earth, the very thought of death had always been shunned, and put away, by him.

There were a great outcry in the place, and great agitation, for he had lived and died a bad and cruel man, and had been much hated even by his own people, and had always been thought an usurer; and now it seemed there was no kind of wealth he had not owned in secret, gold and silver, scrip and bond, and, though none of his persuasion can own house or land in Rome, many of those Ghetto leases, one of which is thought a fine fair fortune.

Would the wealth all fall to the State, lapse to the Church ?

That was the excitement of the quarter as, later on next day, when the lean frightful body of him had been shovelled into the earth of their burial place going towards Aventine, the men of law spent long hours unearthing all the evidences of his riches, and though sunset was near at hand, yet were far off the close of their labours, searching and sealing from morn to eve.

I said nothing to any one, but went home ; got those papers which she had first put in my hands in those early days when she had lived under the shadow of my Hermes ; and took them to those chambers in the Vatican where dwelt my mighty friend, who had risen to be a cardinal, and very mighty and powerful, and was a good and generous man withal ;—for in those days one could do nothing without a voice from the Vatican, and with it could do everything in Rome.

He was a good man, and a great man, and had never forgotten that but for my poor service to him in his youth, he in all likelihood would never

have lived to wear the broad scarlet hat above his level classic brows.

He was kind ; he was even interested ; he kept the matter in his own hands ; he could propel the law, and fulfil it ; in a word, he so acted that the chief treasures of the dead man awaited her, whenever she should claim them.

I only told him I had lost her, and all clue to her. I could not tell him of Hilarion.

Why do all things come too late ?

The eastern people say the gods sit above and laugh to see the woe and perplexity and pain of men ; verily, devils themselves might weep before those two little words—too late.

When he told me that this should certainly be hers, that if I could find her living, and bring her into Rome, she should become possessor of all this strange accursed wealth, got together, none knew how, throughout a long lonely life of horrible barrenness, and hatred of all human things, when he told me, I say, I felt giddy.

I remember coming out from his gracious presence, and passing down those gigantic staircases between the Swiss in their yellow jerkins and

their cuirasses of steel, and going out along the long stone passages into the daylight like a drunken man.

Had it been but a little earlier, only a little earlier ! Had it come only just ere the earth had had time to bear and blossom and be reaped for harvests these three short summers !

What was the shield of Athene beside what the shield of gold would have been ?

What power had love or the arts to shelter, compared with what the mere force of wealth would have had ?

I cursed the dead man in his grave.

Brutal it might be, but I was so :—brutal as one may be who in savage wars sees the daughter of his heart and hearth dishonoured and lying lifeless, with a sword thrust in her breast, when so little could have saved her—just a moment—just a word !

I went down out of the Vatican into the noble sunlit square, where in a high west wind the fountains were tossing like waves of the sea all foam, and blown aloft in a storm ; and the black shadow of the mighty obelisk was travelling

slowly across the whiteness of the place like the shadow of the arm of Time.

Within, in the Sistine vaults, there were the multitudes come to judgment, and the opening heavens, and the yawning graves, and all the awful greatness that is veiled in the dusk as the voices chaunt the *Miserere* :—if the day prefigured there ever break, will none rise from the tomb to ask why salvation came too late ?





CHAPTER IV.

I WENT to Pippo, and I said to him :

“ You are an old friend, and a true one, will you lend me a sum of money ? ” and I assured him that for what I wanted, there were things enough still in the chamber to give him back his loan if that was what he feared.

But Pippo scratched his head mournfully.

“ Dear one, do not ask it,” said he. “ Friendship is a sturdy plant, a sweet herb and a savoury, but when it touches the purse-strings—somehow it shrivels. I should be loth to love you less. So let us say nothing about money.”

It was wise in him, no doubt, and he proceeded to show that it was because of his very love for me, that he spoke so, after cooking for

me more than a score of years, and charging me at pleasure.

Ersilia, who had listened as she washed her clothes on the edge of the well in the yard, hung her linen to dry, then followed me out.

“I have money, take it,” said she. “If it be to find *her*, or to do any good for her. And when you see her, tell her that I have promised Our Lady six candles as tall as I am if only She will bring her back, but to be sure the maiden never cared for these things, nor believed in them. Nay, take the money. I am not like Pippo. You will pay me again, and if not—not. I have cursed her many a time, but I would walk bare-foot to bring her back.”

I saw the hot tears in her fierce black eyes, with the brown wrinkles round them; she was a stern and hasty soul, but her heart was true.

But I would not take a woman’s money, and I went and unlocked the chamber of mine, that I never had entered since the day that I had sold Hermes in the barter, which had been to me as the bidding to bind his son to the altar must have been to Abraham of old.

And I took the other things that I had, the Etruscan armlet, and the bronze catacomb lamp, and the beautiful fire-blackened flower-crowned colossal head, and sold them to men who had the heart to chaffer and deal in such sacred things—I never had been able to do it—and put the money that they gave me in a leathern bag, and set off on my way to the gilded city that Hilarion best loved.

For there I knew that quite easily, I or any-one could hear of him, and know at once whither he had gone, and who was with him.

“Bring her back!” Alas! from the path she had taken there is no return.

Yet I went to search for her; having now these tidings of her inheritance.

I took the money, and made up my little pack as in the days of my wanderings, so that it strapped tightly on my back, and called to Palès to come with me, and left Rome once more. It was in the light shining weather of early autumn, when the air is once more elastic after the swooning heats of summer, and there is the scent of fresh wine everywhere upon the wind,

and oranges begin to fall at your feet, as you walk, and the arbutus begins to redden its berries, and the maize has its embrowned plumes, tall as the saplings of maple.

It matters nothing how I fared ; toiling on through the white dust along that road by the sea, with the blue waves underneath and the green palms above me.

I walked all the way ; the sum of Ersilia's money was small, and I could not tell how I might need it. Often I paid my night's lodging and supper by an hour of stitching at broken shoeleather, and Palès if tired never complained.

I knew a dog once which, taken from its home in Paris to new owners in Milan, ran away from the unknown master, and found its way on foot all those many weary miles across the mountains, back to Paris, and died upon the doorstep of its old home ; this is true ; no fancy, but a fact ; will you heed it, you who call the animals dumb beasts ?

I only did what that poor lonely little dog found possible, hunted and baffled, and tormented with hunger and thirst, as no doubt it

must have been, all along the cruel strange highways.

I walked along the sea-road first, and then across the great central plains of France, and it was fair autumn weather always, broken only by noble storms, that swept the land majestically, and made the swollen rivers rise.

The air had the first crispness of winter when I entered the city of Paris.

I was weary in limb and brain, but I went straight to the house of Hilarion.

I had not seen it since the night that Lilas had died there. It was in a bye-street, being an old small palace in a noble but antiquated quarter ; it had belonged to his mother's people in other centuries ; it stood between court and garden, and was darkened by some stately trees of lime and chestnut. I found it not without difficulty ; it was evening ; I rang at the large bronze gate-bell, without thinking what I should do when it was answered.

An old servant came and replied to me through the bars of the gates. Hilarion was not there ; he had gone away in the spring ; no-

doubt he would return soon for the winter ; they could not tell where he was ; no, there was no one in the house except domestics. That was all he said, or would say, being trained to silence no doubt.

I turned away, and went into the busier streets, Palès clinging close to me, for the blithe and busy gaiety, and the crowds, and the glitter, and the innumerable lamps, made these streets so strangely bewildering after the dusky moonlit ways of Rome, with their vast flights of stairs, and their great deserted courts, and their melody of murmuring waters, and their white gleam of colossal marbles or gigantic domes.

The city was all in the height of a fine frosty winter-night's merriment, and, what seemed to me after such long absence incredible, multitudes, all light-hearted and light-footed, were pouring down the streets, going to theatres or cafés or other places of diversion, with the lights all sparkling all amongst their trees, and the windows of their shops, and frontages of their buildings all gay with colour and ornament and invitation to amusement.

I felt my head whirl ; I, who had sat so long by the moss-grown fountain in the wall, where even Carnival had reeled away without touching me, and had left me quiet.

I sat down on a bench under a plane-tree, and tried to collect my thoughts.

Now that I had come, what could I do ? how nearer was I ? I seemed to myself to have come on a fool's errand.

Under the tree was one of those gay little painted metal houses they call kiosques, where they sell newspapers always, and sometimes volumes as well. In this little minaret-shaped toy, with its bright gas, and its ear-ringed black haired girl to sit in it, I saw Hilarion's name in large letters ; there was a new poem of his on sale there, just as Martial's used to be sold at "the shop of Secundus, the freedman of the noble Lucens, behind the Temple of Peace."

The volume was called Fauriel.

I asked the woman if it were selling well ; she laughed at me for an ignoramus ; who was I that did not know that all Paris thought and spoke of nothing else ?

I bought the slender, clear-typed book. I sat down under the trees and read it: Palès at my feet.

It was beautiful; he seldom wrote anything that was otherwise. He had the secret of a perfect melody, and the sense of unerring colour and form.

It had but a slight story: Fauriel loved and wearied of love; there was little else for a theme; but the passion of it was like a pomegranate blossom freshly burst open to the kiss of noon; the weariness of it was like the ashes of a house.

The union was intoxication to his own generation, which craves contrasts, as the sick palate craves to be burnt and cloyed.

I sat under the leafless branches and read the book by the light of the lamps above me. There were bands playing near some wheeling waltzing dreamy measure; the verse seemed to go with the music; the crowd went by, the many wheels made a sound like the sea; beyond at the end was the white pile of Napoleon's arch, and wintry masses of trees and countless lights:—if I look

at a line of the poem now all the scene comes back to me.

As I read, the scorching passion, like a sand-wind that burns and passes; the hollow love, that even in its first fresh vows was not sincere; the cruel autopsy of a dead desire, the weary contempt of human nature; the slow voluptuous and yet indifferent analysis of the woman's loneliness and of the amorous charm that could no more last than lasts the hectic flash of the sky at evening time—they all seemed to cut into my very flesh like stripes.

I seemed to hear her doom in them, the letters seemed stamped in fire.

I read it as a man reads a death warrant, seeing from beginning to end, as it were, in one flash of horrible comprehension. It told me no more than I knew, indeed; and yet it seemed to kill all hope in me. Because this book was freshly written, and it told me that the poet of it knew nothing of love save its brutality and its satiety: and how as a lover could he give any more than he knew?

It phrenzied me. It seemed to me as if I saw

her dead, and he showing all her unveiled beauties to the gaze of men, as Nero showed in death Agrippina. I tore the paper-cover off it, and the pages with their delicate printing, and bit them through and through with my teeth, and flung them on the ground and to the winds.

People passing by me must have thought me mad : the boys of the streets ran and caught the flying pages from the gutter to make them into any of the ten thousand uses that the ingenuity of poverty can teach them. Then I rose and tried to remember where I was, and to find my way to a cheap house of call where I had used to live with the comedians twenty odd years before.

That little hostelry had been pulled down to make way for the blank, glaring, dreary, plastered piles which your modern architects love, and which have no more story in them, or light and shade, or meaning of any kind, than has an age-worn coquette's hard enamelled face.

The little wine-shop, once the abode of much harmless merriment and wise content, had been pulled down ; but I found another that suited

me, and stayed on in Paris, going every night and day to stare up at Hilarion's house, and ring at the closed gate, and receive the same answer, until the keeper of the gate grew angry, and threatened to hand me over to the keeping of gendarmes.

No doubt wiser folks and richer ones would have gone at once to the aid of the law to find her or hear of her, in many various ways, but I was afraid : we Trasteverini have no love of the law, or of its administrators, high and low, and I thought it best, rightly or wrongly, to keep close my own counsel.

Once passing a great public place, newly erected, and very handsome in the soulless sort of splendour which is the highest that your modern architecture ever reaches, I saw through the ranges of the columns in its halls the Nero and the Actea high-throned in a place of honour.

The young artists were speaking of it.

“How perfect it is,” said one ; “he is a great man.”

“Aye, truly,” said the other ; “and what a beautiful life his has been ; beautiful as any

Greek's in Ægina. If there be one whom I envy——”

I hurried out of the hall, sick at heart.

It had been a beautiful life indeed, and I had ruined it when I had bidden him take the face of his Actea from my Ariadnê.

So ill does the world judge: seeing but the golden-green burnished smooth side of the laurel leaf, and not knowing the bitterness and the poison in it for him who chews it.

Fame consoles, say the vulgar: oh, fools! that which has the strength to achieve fame, has also the strength that does intensify the pang of every woe.

Going through the streets, with Palès clinging to my heels, not noticing any of the sights and sounds about me, but seeing before my eyes, as though they were written everywhere, upon the stones and in the sky, those beautiful vile mocking verses and treasures of language sent to show the hopeless vainness of all human loves, the music of a flute divinely played, caught my dull ear and made me pause.

There is so much music in Paris always that

I cannot tell why this should have had power to enter my brain and make me stop, but so it was; and Palès pricked her sandy fox-like ears, as though in that multitude of strangers seeing some familiar face. I went where the flute was being played, before a coffee-house door, beneath the roadside trees, under the bright still skies and the shine of the gaslights.

It was hard to see the player, for there were so many people crowding round and sitting at ease upon green iron chairs, sipping coffee and eating sweet things, for the night was serene and not cold. But I listened standing on the edge of the crowd, and though all flutes have but one voice amongst them, yet it seemed to me that this one spoke with the sweet sad sound that I had heard at Daila, when the peaches had been ripe, and edging in a little nearer, I saw that the player was Amphion, whom I had never seen from the night that he had sent Maryx and myself to the seashore.

When I had returned to Rome after that time I had utterly forgotten him, and when remembering, I reproached myself and asked of him, I

had been able to hear nothing ; the fisherman by Quattro Capi could only say he had been an honest though not a useful lad whilst with him, and had gone away—out of the city, for aught that he knew.

And now I was sure that this was Amphion playing here,—with the small olive face and the big black eyes, and the nervous girlish hands, and making such soft, sweet, wailing music, that even the Paris crowd was still and touched.

When the music ceased he took off the flat scarlet cap that he wore on his dark curls, and held it out to those who had listened ; they were numerous, and all gave willingly. The flute he played on was a common one of ebony : not the silver flute of Daïla. He divided it and slipped it in his breast, as his way always had been ; then came out of the crowd.

I stopped him : “ Do you know me ? ” I said. “ Where are you going ? Why do you struggle like that ? ”

For he was trying to escape me.

He stood still, finding me resolute, but his face was downcast and his voice faltered, as he stam-

mered some ill-connected words of where he lived and how it fared with him: then looking me suddenly in the face, the tears sprang into his eyes, he drew me aside hurriedly down into a passage-way.

“ You are old and poor. I can tell you,” he said, quickly. “ I shall not be jealous of you. You care for her, but you cannot keep her. Come home with me, and I will tell you.”

“ She is in the city, then ? ” I said, with a great leap at my heart, and a dizziness before my sight.

“ Yes, yes,” he said, impatiently. “ Come home with me.”

I kept pace with his lithe and quick young steps to a house on the river.

“ You will make me lose money,” he said, restlessly, looking backward at the crowded and illuminated streets we left.

He had changed sorely from the pretty soft lad that he had been at Daila; poverty and feverish passions, and the air and the ways of cities, had pinched and wasted his features and given a false colour to his worn cheeks, and a piteous eagerness to his glance. He drew me

aside in a little passage-way, where there was a bench under a pear-tree, and a sign of a silver deer swinging, as I well remember, in the artificial light.

“ Sit down,” he said, imperiously, and yet timidly. “ You will say I have done wrong, no doubt. But if the time were to come over again I would not do otherwise. I could not.”

I shook with impatience.

“ Who cares what you have done or left undone ? ” I cried cruelly, “ Who cares ? —tell me of her : has he left her ? ”

Amphion laughed aloud.

“ Have you read Fauriel ? ”

“ I have had it read to me. I can understand the tongue now. Have you read it ? Oh, it is beautiful, so the world says—it is beautiful, no doubt. Only reading it ! why do you ask ? ”

A great heart sickness came over me : I held him with both my hands on his arm.

“ For the love of God tell me in a few words, since you know everything, it would seem—is she near me now ? Is she living ? Has he forsaken her quite ? ”

Amphion was silent, thinking.

“Come with me,” he said, and turned towards the quarter where the grey Seine was gliding in the moonlight through Old Paris, the Paris of Philippe d’Orléans and of the Reine Isabeau.

Something in the boy’s look and the sound of the voice froze my blood in my veins and nailed my tongue to my throat.

I thought to see her lying dead, or perhaps to see some nameless wooden cross above the ditches where the friendless and forlorn lie buried.

I could not ask him another word. Palès crept after us wearily with her head hung down.

I had forgotten that for ten hours I had never eaten nor drank.

He took me to a house standing quite on the water, with the towers and walls of the more ancient quarter close about it, and a few trees and the masts of boats rising above their boughs. He climbed a steep dark stairway, smelling of all foul odours, and paused up on high before a closed door.

“Go in there,” he said, and opened the door.

My heart stood still. I had no clear thought of anything that I should see, only one idea—that she must be within the chamber lying dead.

I set my foot upon the threshold with the ghastliest fear my life had ever known.

The room was almost in darkness, for one small lamp would not light it; it was a garret, but clean and spacious, with one casement, through whose leaded panes the stars were shining, and the zinc roofs were glistening under the rays of the moon.

There was the form of a woman there: her face I could not see. She was leaning her forehead against the window. She did not turn or move at the unclosing of the door. Pâles ran forward whining; then I knew who it was; I went to her timidly, and yet in joy, seeing that she lived, even though she lived in misery.

“ My dear, will you not speak to me ? ” I said, and tried to touch her hand. “ Will you not even look ? I am your friend always, though poor, and of so little use ”—and then I stopped, and a greater horror than the fear of death con-

sumed me, for as she turned her face towards me there was no light of any kind in it, no light of the reason or the soul ; it had the mild, dumb, patient pain of a sick animal upon it, and in the great eyes, so lustrous and wide opened, there was no comprehension, no answer, no recognition.

The eyes looked at me ; that was all ; they did not see me.

“ Will he be long ? ” she said : her voice sounded faint, and far away.

“ Do you not know me, oh, my dear ? Do you not even know me ? ” I cried in my mortal agony : she did not seem even to hear ; she sighed a little wearily, and turned to the casement and leaned her forehead there. I burst into tears.

I shall always see that bare white room and the plank floor, and the high garret window, with the stars shining through it, as long as I see anything on earth. Sometimes in the night I wake up shivering, and thinking I am there ; with her lustrous, hopeless eyes looking at me so, with no sight in them and no reason.

“ Oh, my dear ! Oh, my dear ! Where is God that he lets such things be ? ” I cried in my suffering, and raved and blasphemed, and knew not what I said, but seemed to feel my very heart-strings being rent asunder.

But she heard nothing, or, at least, she took no notice ; she was looking through the narrow panes, as if her lover were to come back to her from heaven.

The boy, standing on the threshold, drew me back to him.

“ She is always like that,” he said, very low. “ It is a pity he cannot see : it would serve him for fine verses.”

“ Hush, for the mercy of heaven. Can you jest ? ”

“ I ? —Jest ? ”

Then I felt ashamed that I had hurt him with such a word, for I saw in his face what he felt.

“ Forgive me, child,” I said humbly to him, as I felt : “ I, too, am mad I think. Mad ! —who dares say any such word—who dares ? —the clearest, purest, loftiest mind that ever loved the sunlight of God’s truth ! Oh, she

will know me in a little while. Let me go back and speak to her again. She has not seen me well, the place is dark."

And again I touched her and spoke, and again her eyes rested on me, not seeming even to see that I was a human thing. "Will he be long?" she muttered once more, being disturbed.

"She asks only that," muttered Amphion. "She says nothing else. You only pain her—you only make her more restless. Come away—now you have seen her."

The boy spoke with the authority of an old greyheaded man, and his boyish face had the look of age. He drew me out across the threshold, and across the narrow passage-way, into another garret, much smaller, and quite as bare.

"You want to hear," he said, with a heavy sigh, pressing his hands to his forehead. "You will be angry: you will say I have done wrong. But I hated to let you know or any one. I was all the friend she had, and though she never knew me, yet that was a kind of joy. Well, this is how it was,—"

He breathed quickly, then drew a long sigh, and so began to speak.

“ You stayed in Rome ; that strong man, too, who makes the carven images : I could not stay. I had plenty of money ; his money ; you remember. I came here. Here, I thought to myself, he would be sure to come : never is he long away from Palès, for he says that here only do men know how to live, if in Rome only can they learn to die. So I stayed here and I watched his house.

“ I know how to watch ; I was friends with the snakes at home. The windows of the house were always shut ; it was like the face of a blind man, it told nothing. One day, that is a year ago now, they opened. I lived in a little room high up, very near ; so high, so near, I could see down into his garden, and I learned their tongue, only I let them believe I did not know it, because so I heard more. He lived his old life ; quite his old life ; it was all pleasure—what he calls pleasure—and she stayed in her own chambers with her marbles. What did she know ? Nothing. She was shut up as you shut a bird ;

once or twice he had her with him at the opera ; she was as white as the statues that she worships ; she had a quantity of old Greek gold upon her. I knew that it was Greek, for I had seen him buy it in Athens. Some one near me said it was Helen—risen. But she is not Helen, nothing is less like her ; she read me of Helen in those old songs of war, in Rome. I think she suffered very much, because all those people looked so at her : as for him he only smiled. This that I tell you of now belongs to last winter. Have patience : I must tell it my own way.

“ There came then to this city the wicked witch from Rome ; she whom you call a duchess ; she sent for him, he went, and when he had gone once, then he went often. She, in those rooms with her marbles, was more than ever alone. Her window opened on to the gardens, and from my garret window I could see. Sometimes she would come out under the trees ; they grow very thickly, and it is damp there, but she would sit still under them hour after hour—and he all the while about in the pleasure places, or with the Roman woman. I do not

think he was cruel to her ; no, I think not ; he only left her : that is not cruelty, they say.

“ When the spring came, and all those lilacs were in flower, and the air, even in this place, was sweet, she was all the day long in the garden, I could see her shadow always on the grass ; the grass hardly ever had his shadow, too. Sometimes I followed him, and I saw how he spent his nights ; if I had been strong, like your sculptor, I would have killed him, but I am only a boy,—why did not the sculptor come ? The Roman woman went away, and he went also ; I learned from his people that he had left no word where he had gone.

“ She used to walk to and fro in the moonlight under the trees, till one was sick to see her. All day long she did nothing, nothing, only sit and listen, I suppose, for his steps, or the sound of some one bringing some word from him. She got a look on her face like the look that your dog’s eyes have when it loses you in a crowd. You know what I mean. Men came and tried to see her ; men who were his friends, that is their friendship ;—but never

would she see any one. She was so foolish, I heard the servants say ; but I think they were sorry for her, and I knew they loved her. All this time I kept myself by means of my flute, and watched the house all the time I was not playing. It was a hot summer : heat is so heavy here, where all these zinc roofs burn your eyes ; it is not like the heat on our shores, where we lie in the air all night, and hear the cool sound of the waves.

“ The summer was horrible here ; it was all clouds of dust by day, and glare of gas by night, and the noise of the streets roaring like an angry beast. She never left the garden. She was never quiet ; she was always moving up and down, and doing nothing ; she who used to do so much in every second of the day in Rome. I heard the people of the house say ‘ she thinks he is coming back ; ’ and the older ones sighed and seemed pitiful, but the man at the gate, who is wicked, laughed with his friends. They tried to enter and see her ; great princes some of them were ; but never would she see any one.

“ One day, when she was walking in the

garden, I saw a messenger take her a great casket; she said not one word, but she threw it on the ground, and the lid of it burst open, and pearls and other jewels rolled out, and she trampled on them and trod them into the earth; —I never had seen her like that. The man who had brought them was frightened, and gathered them up and hurried away. The man at the gate laughed, and told him she was a fool.

“That is how the summer went by; and from my garret I could always see her, and all the long moonlit nights she would pace up and down there under those trees:—and the lilacs grew shrivelled and black. Then all at once I missed her. Days went by; at last I asked; the man at the gate laughed again: ‘she is gone,’ said he, ‘she is a lovely creature, but not human I think; he wrote to her, but she did not understand; she is gone away, somewhere or other, you see she did not understand—as if it were not always so.’ What is always so?”

The Greek lad sighed, and drew his breath wearily; then again took up the thread of his

bald narrative, which he told in simple, unlearned fashion.

“ Of course I searched for her everywhere, but it was long before I found her. The man at the gate seemed uneasy, for fear of the displeasure of Hilarion ; but he said, ‘ we have no orders ; we can do nothing ; when he comes back—’ So they did not stir, nor care : as for me, I thought she was dead. But still I sought high and low.

“ One day, in this very street, I heard some women talking ; this woman whom you have seen with her was one of them ; they spoke of a stranger who was dying of hunger, yet who had spent the only coin she could earn by making the nets for the fishermen of the Seine, in buying grey clay and earth. Then I thought of her, for often she would mend the old men’s nets by the Tiber, having learned to do it by the sea ; and who but she would have bought sculptors’ clay instead of bread ?

“ Then I questioned the French woman of her, and little by little she told me. She has a good soul, and a tender one, and she was

sorrowful, though knowing nothing. ‘This girl is beautiful,’ she said, ‘and belongs to noble people, I think, but she has had some great grief, or else is mad. She passed down my street one day at daybreak and asked for a little empty room that I had to let, and told me that she had not a coin in the world, and bade me get her the fishing-nets to make or mend. I do not know why she spoke to me; children and dogs like me,—perhaps that was why. And she seemed to be in such great woe, that I had not the heart to turn her away; and I gave her the room, and got her the work, and piteous it is to see her lovely slender hands amongst all that rough cordage and hemp, and torn by them, and yet working on and on; and with the first money she gained she bought clay, and she began to model a statue, like the figures one sees in the churches; and all day she makes or mends the nets, and half the night, or more, labours at this clay; and she is mad, I think, for she never speaks, and scarcely a mouthful passes her lips, save a draught of water.’

“ And when the woman told me this, then I felt sure that it was she. And I told a lie as of having lost my sister, and begged to see her, and after a while the woman, who was anxious, and even frightened, let me go up to the room on the roof. And this is how I found her.

“ The room was bare, and there was a heap of nets on the floor, and there was a statue in clay, which had his features and his form, only it was winged and seemed like a god. She was clad in the rough white garments she wore in Rome, and her arms were bare, and she was modelling the clay still with her hands, and she never heard me enter nor the woman speak, who said to me, trembling, ‘ Look—is it a false god that she will not even leave it to break bread ? ’ And I said to her, ‘ Aye ; it is a false god.’ For indeed, it was in his very likeness ; only greater than he, more beautiful, more perfect, as, no doubt, he always seemed to her : may he live for ever in pain, and die without a friend !

“ The woman, trembling, went and touched her, and said, ‘ come away, it is night, you must be hungry.’ She turned and looked at us both.

‘Hush! it will be finished very soon; when it is done he will come back.’ Then she turned again to the statue, and worked on at it, and her hands seemed so feverish that I thought they must have burnt the clay as they touched it. ‘Is she your sister?’ asked the woman; and I lied and answered ‘yes;’ and together we stood and watched her. ‘Whilst she still made the nets, she seemed to have some reason left, though she never spoke,’ said the woman, ‘but since she has touched that earth she seems mad. Is it indeed your sister? What sorrow is on her that she is thus?’ But I could not speak. I watched her till I felt suffocated. I knew not what I did. I was beside myself. God forgive me!

“I had my knife in my vest—the knife that should have ended his life in those nights of his pleasure, if I had not been a coward—such a coward! And now like the foolish wretch I was, I so loathed the sight of that image, and of her lovely life wasting and burning away on it, that as I saw it I sprang upon it, and plunged my knife into the very breast of it, and the moist

clay reeled and crumbled, and fell away, and all its beauty sank down into a mere heap of earth —God forgive me!

“ And she herself fell down at the sight of the ruined thing, as though my knife had stricken her life ; fell with a great cry, as if her very heart were bursting ; and her forehead struck the stones, and the blood came from her mouth.”

His voice sank into silence with a sob. For me, I sat quietly by his side, with the Seine water flowing underneath the wall down below, and the lamps looming yellow through the mist.

I wanted to know nothing more. I saw all the cruel months and years, as in a mirror one sees one’s own eyes looking back at one.

“ Go on,” I said to the lad ; and after a little he took up his tale.

“ She was like a dead creature many days and weeks,” he said. “ We called help ; they gave it some learned name ; some fire of the spine and brain, they called it. She rose from her bed, for she is strong, they say, but her mind seems gone ever since then. ‘ Will he be long?’

she is always asking ; that is all ; you have heard her ? ”

“ Yes ; I have heard her.”

I spoke calmly, but it seemed to me as if the lamps burning through the fog were lights of hell, and I heard all its fiends laughing.

“ How has she lived all this while ? ”

This had passed in September, the boy said, and we were now in March, and passing into early days of spring, and all the while that treasure and ill-got wealth, hoarded in Fiumara, had been waiting her, whilst she was lying between life and death in this river attic in the heart of a foreign city !

He hung his head, ashamed.

“ I should have sent to you ; yes, I knew, I thought of that, but I could not : it was horrible, yet it was a kind of happiness to be the only thing between her and the workhouse—the hospital—the grave. For without me she would have gone there. ‘ She is my sister,’ I said to the woman, and they believed me, and let me do for her. My money was almost gone, but I had the flute, and I could always get money in

plenty, playing here and there. They would have hired me for the great theatres, but I was afraid of that. I have played at the singing places in the open air—nowhere else—for I was always afraid he might return and see me, and so know. Indeed, she has wanted for nothing, for nothing that we could give. She is as well here as if she were in a palace ; she knows nothing of where she is. Of the statue she does not seem to have any remembrance ; the people shovelled it away—it was only a heap of grey earth. You are angered ; you think I did wrong—yes—but for the moment, almost, I thought the clay image was alive, and I fancied I should set her free of its spell. Indeed, indeed, she wants for nothing. She is docile ; she lets the woman do what she likes ; but all day long she watches the window, and all she says is that,—will he be long ? The woman says she sleeps but very little ; when she awakes she says always the same thing. And all Paris raves and weeps over Fauriel ! ”

The boy laughed bitterly, the tears coursing down his cheeks.

“ I suppose he never sends to know where she is, else his people would seek for her,—it is so easy to know anything in this city. I think they have never tried to know. She has never gone out of that room since that day,” he continued. “ She has all she can want, oh, yes ! indeed ; she does not know whether it is a garret or a palace ; only sometimes, I think, she feels the want of air, without knowing what it is she feels :

“ You will say I should have sent to you. Yes, I thought of it ; but you see, I cannot write, and then I have been glad to be the only one near her—the only thing she had. Of course she does not know. She sees me very often, but she never knows me. There is always that blank look in her eyes. I suppose it is her brain that is gone :

“ Oh ! you are angry ; do not be angry. Perhaps I did ill. But had I let you know you would have come, and that man who lives on the Golden Hill, and is rich ; and she would never have wanted me any more.

“ I make plenty of money ; yes, indeed. If

I went to the concerts, I should be rich, too, they say, and I have been so happy to work for her, and to buy flowers and pretty things—though she never seems to see them—and then, I think always, some day that cloud that seems over her will break and go away, and then perhaps I shall dare to say to her, “I have been of some little use; just look at me kindly once.” And you see, if I had let you know, all that would have been over, as it is over now. Of course you will take her away?”

“Be still, for the pity of heaven!” I cried to him. “Be still, or I shall too be mad.”

For the simple tale, as the lad told it, was to me as full of woe and terror as the sublimest tragedy that ever poet writ. Listening, I seemed to see and to hear all that had been suffered by her; every one of his poor words was big with grief, big as the world itself for me. Oh, why had I broken the steel!

Men repent of evil, they say; it is ten thousand times more bitter to repent of having held back from evil. Sorely, and in passion and

agony, I repented then having held my hand in Venice.

The boy was nothing to me. I had no mercy for him or remembrance.

It was quite late at night. I sat dumb and stupid in his garret on the edge of his truckle-bed ; the muffled sound of all the life of Paris came up dully, like the distant sound of the sea when one is miles inland.

“Will you take her away ?” he said, with a piteous entreaty in his voice.

“Let me think,” I said to him ; and the stars and the roofs seemed to whirl, and all the pulses of the bestial world to beat in mine.

For it is bestial : a beast that for ever devours and has never enough.

Yes, of course I would take her away ; I would take her to Rome.

Rome is the mighty mother of nations ; in Rome she might find peace once more.

I had heard in other days that sometimes when the mind is shaken from its seat, and reason clouded by any great shock, nothing is so likely to restore it and awaken consciousness as the

sight of a familiar place and a beloved scene, linked by memory with perished happiness.

Yes, I would take her away.

Here I did not dare to ask for any counsel or any surgeon's aid ; I had a dread of the inquisition of strangers and of the many delays of long inquiry, and the same feverish eagerness that Amphion had had to keep close to himself her sorrow and her needs, did now consume me likewise.

If I could only get her back once more, I said to myself, back to the chamber on the river.

And with that odd remembrance of trifles which comes to me sometimes across great woe, I thought what a pity it was that Hermes was gone, and that there were now no red and golden bean-flowers to run across the casement !

“ Yes, I will take her away,” I said.

The poor lad said nothing ; his head dropped on his chest. He had done all he could, and for six months had gone to and fro, and out in all weathers, playing to get the means wherewith to find her shelter and care, denying himself, and

thinking only of her ; but to me then he was no more than any one of the leafless lime-boughs drooping by the gates of Hilarion.

Shivering I went across the passage-way and opened the door of her chamber. The woman that he paid for such service was sitting there, sewing at linen, a woman old and gentle ; she herself was sitting, too, with her arms leaning on the bare table, and one hand dreamily moving into figures some loose white rose-leaves fallen from a rose-tree in a pot. She did not hear me or heed me. When I touched her she lifted her heavy eyes, in which a light like that of flame seemed to burn painfully.

“ Will he be long ? ” she said, and moved the rose-leaves to and fro feverishly.

The woman shook her head.

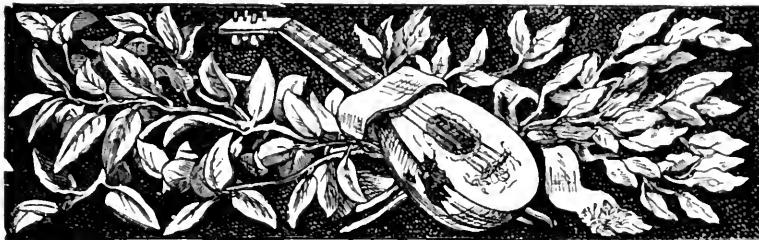
“ That is all she ever says,” she muttered as she stitched. “ She says it in her sleep—such times as she does sleep—and she wakes stretching out her arms. Who is he ? He must be a beast.”

“ He is a poet ! ” I said, and went out from the chamber into the lighted ways of the city and

their noise. My brain seemed reeling, and my eyes were blind.

In the gay and shining avenues, all alight and full of moving crowds, women were talking with wet soft eyes of Fauriel.





CHAPTER V.

NEXT day I got such changes in my papers as were needful for the journey, and I took her on her homeward way. She did not resist. She was not in any way sensible of where she went, and she was docile, like a gentle animal stunned with many blows. Her bodily health did not seem weak, though she was very feverish, and her pulses stopped at times in a strange way.

The woman who had been with her wept at parting from her.

“ Will she find him there ? ” she asked.

“ Nay, never there, nor anywhere,” I said ; for who finds love afresh that once has been forsaken ?

She had had the clue and the sword, and she

had given them up to him, and he in return had given her shipwreck and death. It was so three thousand years ago, and it is so to-day, and will be so to-morrow.

From my little stock of money I paid that woman well, for she had been true and tender; the rest I spent in going back to Rome. The boy came with me. I was hard and cruel to him at that time, but I could not say him nay.

Throughout the journey she did not change in any way; the noise, and movement, and many changes, seemed to perplex and trouble her vaguely, as they trouble a poor lamb sent on that iron road, but no more. She never spoke, except now and then when she would look wistfully out at some gleam of sky or water or spreading plain, and ask: "will he be long?" Neither of me nor of Amphion had she the slightest consciousness. It was the madness of one all-absorbent and absorbed idea; indeed, what else is Love?

Even the beautiful snow-ranges and the serene glory of the mountains, from which I had hoped something, failed to alter her or rouse her. I think she did not know them from the clouds, or

see them even. No doubt all she ever saw in daylight or in darkness was one face alone.

It seemed to me as if that journéy would never end ; to me it was like a horrible, distorted dream, a nightmare in which an appalling horror leaned for ever on my heart ; all the splendours of early spring, of virgin snows, of clear blue ice, of falling avalanche and glacier spread upon the mountain side, and underneath in the deep valleys the lovely light of the fresh green, and of the purples and azures mantling the rocks where the gentians blossomed—all these, I say, only served to heighten the ghostliness of that long passage through the slow short days back to my country.

For despair went with me.

But tardy and terrible though it was, it drew on towards its end before many suns had risen and set.

It is so beautiful, that highway to our Rome across the land from Etrurian Arezzo ; the Umbrian soil is rich and fresh, masses of oak clothe the hills, avenues of oak and beech and clumps of forest-trees shelter the cattle and break the lines of olive and of vine ; behind are the

mountains, dusky against the light, with floating vapours veiling them, and half hiding some ruined fortress or walled village, or some pile, half palace and half prison, set high upon their ridges ; and ever and again, upon some spur of them or eminence, there is some old grey city, mighty in the past and still in fame immortal ; Cortona, with its citadel like a towering rock, enthroned aloft ; Assisi, sacred and grey upon the high hill-top ; Spoleto, lovely in her ancientness as any dream, with calm deep woods around, and at her back the purple cloud-swept heights that bear its name ; Perugia Augusta, with domes and towers, cupolas and castles, endless as a forest of stone ; Foligno, grand and gaunt, and still and desolate, as all these cities are, their strength spent, their fortresses useless, their errand done, their genius of war and art quenched with their beacon-fires ; one by one they succeed one another in the long panorama of the Appenine range ; wood and water, and corn and orchard, all beneath them and around them, fruitful and in peace, and in their midst, lone Trasimene, soundless and windless, with the silvery birds at rest upon its silvery

waters, and here and there maybe a solitary sail, catching the light and shining like a silver shield amidst the reedy shallows.

Then, after Trasimene come the wild bold gorges of the Sabine mountains ; wooded scarps, bold headlands, great breadths of stunted brush-wood, with brooks that tumble through it; rocks that glow in the sun with the deep colours of all the marbles that earth makes ; deep ravines, in which the new-born Tiber runs at will ; and above these the broad blue sky, and late in the day the burning gold of a stormy sunset shining out of pearly mists that wreath the lower hills ; then the wide level green plains, misty and full of shadows in the twilight, white villages hung aloft on mountain edges like the nests of eagles ; then a pause in the green fields, where once the buried vestals were left alone in the bowels of the earth, with the single loaf and the pitcher of water, to face the endless night of eternity ; then "Roma," says some voice as quietly as though the mother of mankind were only a wayside hamlet where the mules should stop and drink.

Aye, there is no highway like it, wander the

world as we will, and none that keeps such memories.

But for me, I saw no loveliness then of city or of citadel, hoary with years; of monastery, sheltered amidst snows and forest; of silent lake sleeping in the serenest folds of the hills. I only strained my ear with the eager hearkening of any spent and hunted animal to hear the name of Rome.

At last I heard it, when the night had fallen, though the moon was not as yet up over the edge of the eastern horizon.

The great bells were booming heavily: some cardinal had died.

Gently, and without haste, I led her by the hand through the old familiar ways, shrouded in shadows under the cold starless skies.

My heart almost ceased to beat. Here was my last hope. If this had no spell to rouse her, she would sleep in the dreams of madness for ever; none would ever awaken her. She had loved the stones and the soil of Rome with a filial devotion; Rome alone would perchance have power to save her.

I walked on and led her by the hand. Her fingers moved a little in my hold as we passed through the Forum, and past the basilica of Constantine, as though some thrill ran through her. But I looked in her face, and there was no change, it was still as stone, and the eyes were burning, and had a sightless look.

I went onward by way of the Capitol, past the Ara Cœli and, the colossal figures of the Dioscuri. Once she paused, and a sort of tremor shook her, and for an instant I hoped for some passing remembrance, ever so slight, that yet should come to link her once more with the living world.

But none came ; her eyes never altered ; she went with me obediently, passively, as she would have gone with any stranger who had led her so, past the great stairs, and the divine Brethren, who once had been to her not any whit less sacred than had been Rome itself.

We went down into the grim grey ruinous streets, that pass under the Tarpeian Rock, with the lichen and the wild shrubs growing on mounds of brick that once were temples, and the

poor crowding together in dusky hovels that once were the arched passages of palaces or the open courts of public pleasure places.

There was little light; here and there a lantern swung upon a cord, or the glow from a smith's forge shone ruddy on the stones. She did not notice anything; she came onward with me, walking straightly, as the blind do. Thence from the darkness and the squalor and the ruin, we came out by winding ways on to the river's bank by Quattro Capi.

The river was full, but not in flood; its tawny hues were brown with the soil of the mountains; on it a few boats were rocking, tied with ropes to the piles of the bridge; the island was indistinct, and the farther shore was dim, but at that instant the moon rose, and lines of silver passed across the pulsing stream, and touched to light the peristyle of the little moss-grown temple by our side, and the falling water of the Medici fountain.

She moved forward of her own will, and walked to the edge of the Tiber, and stood and looked on the strong swift current and the shadowy

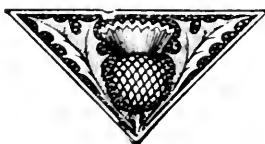
shores, and on the domes and roofs and towers and temples that were gathered like a phantom city on the edges of the shores.

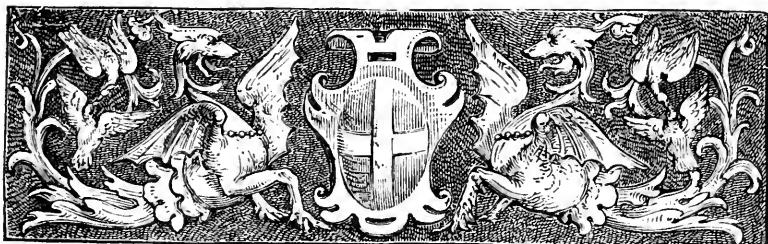
She looked in silence.

Then all at once the blindness passed from her eyes, she saw; and knew the sight she saw. She stretched out her arms, with a tremulous hesitation and gesture of ineffable welcome.

“This is Rome!” she cried, with a great sigh, while her very soul seemed to go forth to the city as a child to its mother: then she fell on her knees and wept aloud.

I knew that she was saved, and Rome had saved her.





CHAPTER VI.

WE stood there, two creatures, quite alone on the edge of the river. There must have been people near, but there were none in sight ; the boats rocked on the little waves ; the heavy masses of the trees were black ; breadths of silvery light rippled under the arches ; from the convent of the Franciscans on the island, there came distant sounds of chanting ; the full moon hung above the pines of Pamfili. She remained kneeling : her head bowed down between her hands. Great sobs shook all her frame.

It was so still ; there might have been only in the city, the ghostly world of all its dead multitudes, it was so still. At last I grew frightened, seeing her thus upon the stones, so

motionless. I touched and raised her; she rose slowly to her feet.

“Have I been mad?” she said to me.

Hardly could I keep from weeping, I myself.

“Nay, my dear, not that,” I said to her.
“Nay, never that; you have been ill. But now—”

She shivered from head to foot. With returning reason no doubt she remembered all things that had passed. She was silent, standing and looking on the Etruscan river, she had loved so well, as it flowed to the sea beneath the moon. Her eyes had lost their strained look of unconscious pain, and the burning light had gone out of them; they were wet and dim, and had an unspeakable misery in them, like that in a young animal’s, when it is dying, and knows that it dies.

“What month is it?” she asked.

I told her.

“It was summer when he wrote,” she said, and then was still again, gazing at the water.

I began to fear that too soon I had rejoiced, and that the clouds would gather over her again, and that she again would lose herself in that

strange awful night of the brain, which we, for want of knowing what it is, call madness.

But watching her features, as the rays of the moon fell on them, I saw gradually returning there the look of silence, of resolution, of endurance, which was natural to them, and which had been on it on that first day of her sorrow, when she had dreamed of Virgilian Rome, and found the Ghetto.

She turned her face to me, and though her voice was broken and faint, it was firm.

“Ask me nothing. I cannot speak,” she said to me. “But you are good. Hide me in some corner of Rome, and find me work. I must live, I must live, since he lives——”

The last words she spoke so low that I scarcely heard them; she was speaking to herself then, not to me. I took her hand.

“Rest in the old place to-night. To-morrow we will see.”

She went with me obediently; speaking no more. There was no one in the entrance or upon the stairs; I had sent the boy there onward, to beg of Ersilia that it might be so; all was

quiet and deserted ; the one lamp burned before the Madonna in the wall.

Strong shivers shook her, but she did not resist. She passed up the staircase with me to my room, where no longer was there Hermes to greet her : Hermes, who made woman, but not such a woman as she was.

They had swept it clean, and it was spacious, but it looked desolate to me ; she however seemed to see no change ; as far as she saw anything she only saw the broad and open window, through which there shone the river and the sky.

I drew her to the hearth where logs were burning. There, suddenly she stopped and looked, then with a cry threw herself forward on the rude warm bricks before the hearth, and kissed them again and again and again, as women kiss the flushed cheek of their sleeping child.

“ Oh, stones, you bore his feet, and felt the rose leaves fall, and heard him say he loved me ! Oh, dear stones, speak and tell me it was true.”

So murmuring to them she kissed the rough warm bricks again and yet again, and laid her

tired head on them and caressed them ; they were not colder than his heart, I thought.

“ Oh, stones, it was no dream ? Tell me it was no dream ? You heard him first ! ” she muttered, lying there, and then she crouched and wept and shuddered, and laid her soft mouth and beating breast to those senseless flags, because once they had borne his feet and once had heard his voice. Would he have laughed had he been there ? Perhaps.

I drew back into the gloom and let her be. She had no thought of me or any living thing, save of him by whom she had been forsaken : no thought at all.

She was mad still, if Love be madness :—and not the sublimest self-oblivion which can ever raise the mortal to deity, as I think.

I let her be ; she had fallen forward with her arms flung outward, and her head resting on the stones. Strong shudders shook her at intervals in the convulsion of her weeping ; but she was otherwise still. The warmth from the burning wood fell on her, and touched to gold the loose thick coils of her hair. I closed the door, and

went out and sat down on the stair outside, and waited in the dark.

Other women one might have striven to console with tidings of the peace that lies in riches ; but her I dared not. When a great heart is breaking because all life and all eternity are ruined, who can talk of the coarse foolish sweetness that lies for fools and rogues in gold ? I could not at the least. Perhaps, because stitching there where the streets meet, and the fountain falls in the open air by the river, gold has always seemed so little to me : so great, indeed, as a tempter, but as a comforter—how poor.

I sat still in the dark, and I did not know how the hours went ; the lamp was burning below in the wall of the twisting staircase, and there was the hum of the distant voices on the bridge, and the sound of the water washing itself away under the bridge arches, and now and then the beat of oars. I had done the best that I could, but it weighed on me as though I had done some crime.

Perhaps she would reproach me for having brought her back to consciousness, as the suicide,

snatched by some passing hand from death, has blamed his saviour. She had only awakened to agony, like the patient under the knife when the anæsthetic has too soon ceased its spell. I only made her suffer more a thousandfold by lifting up that cloud upon her brain. Yet I had done for the best, and I had praised heaven for its mercies when she had looked with eyes of consciousness upon the moonlit Tiber, and had cried aloud the name of Rome !

I had done for the best : so had I done when I had gone up to the Golden Hill, and told the story of my dream to Maryx.

As my memories went back to him, thinking dully there in the dark, not daring to enter the chamber again, for there was no sound, and I thought perhaps she slept in the gloom and the warmth of the heat, a footfall that was familiar came upon the stairs, a shadow was between me and the dull lamp swinging down below, the voice of Maryx came through the silence and the darkness to my ear.

“ Are you there ? ” he said to me, “ are you there ? ”

“Yes, I am here. Hush! speak low!” I answered him; and I rose up, afraid, for I had had no idea that he could have returned to Rome, which was stupid in me, doubtless, because several months had gone by since I had set forth to walk across France, and from home I had had no tidings, since none of my friends could either read or write.

A vague fear fell upon me, I hardly know why, seeing his dark and noble head bending down upon mine in the gloom.

“Hush! speak low!” I said to him, and I rose up from the stair and stared up at him. “You are come back?”

“Yes, I have come back. I heard that he was with another woman, there in Cairo; is that true?”

“No doubt it is true; I cannot tell where he may be, but *she* is here—alone.”

His great dark eyes seemed to have flame in them, like a lion's by night, as they looked down into mine in the dusk of the stairway. He gripped my shoulder with a hard hand.

“Tell me all,” he said. And I told him.

Once he moaned aloud, like a strong beast in torture, as he heard : that was all.

He heard me without breaking his silence to the end. Then he leaned against the wall of the stairs and covered his face with his hands, and I saw the large tears fall through his clasped fingers, and drop one by one.

No doubt the man who sees what he cherishes dead by disease in her youth suffers much less than he did then. For to Maryx she was not only lost as utterly as by death, but she had perished in her soul as in her body ; she was destroyed more absolutely than if he had beheld the worms of the grave devour her. The lover who yields what he loves to Death, tries to believe he does but surrender her to God ; but he——

“ Oh, my love, my love ! ” he said once : that was all.

Very soon he had mastered his weakness and stood erect, and the veins were like knotted ends on his bold broad forehead.

“ We are free——now,” he said : and I was silent. For I knew what he meant.

But what would vengeance serve her ? It seemed

to me, a Roman, to whom vengeance was wild justice and sacred duty, for the first time, a poor and futile thing. It could change nothing; undo nothing; restore nothing. What use was it? If one killed him what would he care?—he was brave, and he believed in no hereafter.

Maryx put out his arm and grasped the old bronze handle of the door.

“Let me see her,” he said.

I clasped his hand in hesitation: I was afraid for him and for her.

“I was her master,” he said bitterly; “I will see her. She shall know that she is not friendless;—nor without an avenger. Let me see her. What do you fear? Have I not learned patience all these years?”

And he turned the handle of the door and entered. I stayed on the threshold in the gloom.

She was lying still upon the hearth as I had left her; her arms were folded, and her head was bent on them; the tumbled masses of her hair hid her face; the flame from the hearth shed a dull red light about the dark and motionless figure.

At the unclosing of the door she started and rose to her feet, and stood as a wounded deer stands at gaze.

Her face was white, and the eyes were dilated, and the misery of all her look was very great; but it had the calmness of reason and much of her old resolve and strength.

When she saw Maryx she knew him, and a deep flush mounted over all the pallor of her face, looking as if it scorched her as it rose.

He was a strong man and had learned patience, as he said, the bitter uncomplaining patience of a hopeless heart, he had thought to be calm. But at the sight of her the iron bonds of his strength were wrenched apart; he shook from head to foot; all the manhood in him melted into a passionate pity, in which all other more selfish passions were for the moment drowned and dead. He crossed the floor of the chamber with a cry, and fell on his knees at her feet.

“Take me,” he muttered, “take me for the only thing I can be—your avenger! Oh, my love, my love!—your lover never, your master even never more, but your friend for ever, and

your avenger. Vengeance is all that is left to us, but as God lives I will give you that."

And he kissed the dust on which she stood, as he swore.

She looked down on him, startled and moved, and with the blood coming and going in her face, and her eyes resting on him, bewildered, and in the old dulness of half-conscious wonder.

Then as he vowed his vow an electric thrill seemed to run through her, she put out her hands and thrust them against the air, as though thrusting him away.

"My friend! And you would hurt him!"

She muttered the words faintly: she was like a creature not fairly awake after a ghastly dream.

Maryx rose slowly to his feet: all the passion of his pity and his pardon frozen in his breast.

"Your avenger—and I will take his life for yours," he answered slowly, as he stood erect before her, and his face, burned darker by the desert sun, had a terrible look upon it.

All the yearning and anguish of months and years had gone out, as in one tempest-driven flood, in the oath with which he had knelt down

on the stones before her as before a thing made, by wrong and by dishonour, only tenfold more sacred and beloved: and all this was frozen in him and turned back upon himself, and lay upon his soul like ice.

She listened, and she understood.

With one splendid gesture she threw her hair out of her eyes, and stood erect, once more a living thing of soul and fire.

“I forbid you!” she cried, as she faced him; and her voice lost its weakness, and rang clear and loud as a bell strikes. “I forbid you! There is nothing to avenge.”

“Nothing? What! You forgive?”

“There is nothing to forgive.”

“What! Are you woman, and born of woman? Are you not forsaken like the vilest thing that lives?”

The burning colour stained her face red once more.

“There is nothing to forgive; he *has* loved me!”

Maryx laughed aloud.

Men who have truth, and honour, and fidelity

spent their lives like water year after year, unloved and uncared for, going to their graves unmourned. And such passion as this was given to falsehood and to faithlessness !

She took a step towards him ; her face was crimson, her mouth was firm, her hair tossed back showed her eyes gleaming, but resolute, under her lovely, low, broad brows—the brows of the Ariadnē.

“ Listen ! ” she said swiftly. “ I have been mad, I think, but now I am sane. I remember ; you were always good—good and great—and I seemed thankless, though I was not so in my heart. You used to be my master, and you were full of patience and pity, and I remember and I am grateful. Yes. But—listen ! Unless you promise me never to touch a hair of his head, never to go near to him save in gentleness, I will kill you before you can reach him. Yes ; I am calm, and I say the thing I mean. Life is over for me, but I will find strength to save him : the gods hear me, and they know.”

Then she was silent, and her mouth shut close, as though it were the mouth of a mask

in marble. Her words were not empty breath, she would have done the thing she said.

There was perfect silence in the chamber. Then Maryx laughed as men laugh in the dreams of fever, or when they die of thirst on a battle-field.

“And they say that God made woman!” he cried aloud.

Her eyes were steady and resolute under the straight classic Ariadnê brows. She was gathering her memories up slowly, one by one, and the courage and endurance natural to her were awoke.

“There is nothing to avenge,” she said again. “Nothing, nothing; if *I* choose to forgive. What are you to me? You have no right. If my father lived and would hurt him, I would say to him what I say to you. He has loved me: can anything alter that? I tired him—he left me—that must be my fault. When the sun passes, does the earth curse the sun?”

Her voice shook, and lost its momentary strength; but she conquered her weakness—since such weakness would be blame to him.

“You are my friend—yet speak of hurting

him ! Do you not know ? While he lives I will live. I could not die and leave him on the earth, in the light, smiling on others ! You will not hurt him ? Promise me ! ”

Maryx made no reply.

“ You do not promise ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then go. I can see you no more until you do.”

She turned her face from him, and with a gesture signed to him to leave her.

He stood there, not seeming to see the sign, nor to see that she had turned away from him.

“ Must one be worthless to be loved like that ! ” he muttered ; and his head fell on his chest, and he looked like an old man grey with age, and he turned and came out from the chamber, moving feebly, and like one blind.

I went from the threshold to her side.

“ Oh, my dear, are you grown cruel ? That man is noble, and full of pity and pain, and in the old time he served you with so much tenderness.”

She crouched down by the side of the hearth and sighed heavily.

“ I cannot help it—let me be.”

Then suddenly she looked up at me with wide-open despairing eyes.

“ He was weary of me. It was my fault: not his. I did not know—I did not know. His love was my glory—how could I tell? When I went to that cruel city then I learned,—I was only a mere frail foolish thing in his sight, as the others were—only that; but how could I tell ?”

And then once more her head sank down, and she wept bitterly.

“ Yet you think those who love you have no right to avenge you ?” I cried to her.

She stretched her arms out to the vacant air.

“ There is no vengeance that would not beggar me more. Whilst he lives, I will find strength to live. What vengeance do I want? He *has* loved me—the gods are good !”

Then she swooned, and lost consciousness, and lay there, by the low fire of the hearth, like

some fair pluckt flower cast down upon the stones.

What could one do? Any vengeance would only beggar her the more.

I sat awake all the long cold night.





CHAPTER VII.

QUITE in the east of Rome, nigh the Porta Tiburtina, on the way that goes to Tivoli, there is an old brick tower, whose age no man knows, and whose walls are all scarred and burned with war.

The winding streets are set about it in a strange network, and at its base there is a great stone basin, where the women wash their linen and the pretty pigeons bathe. From its easements, barred with iron, you looked downward into one of the green gardens, shadowed with leaning pines and massive ilex, that are the especial glory of our city; and outward you saw over all the majestic width of Rome, away to the far distance where the trees of Monte Mario

arise, and the Spada Villa sits on the hillside, like an old man who crouches and counts over the crimes of his youth, to the lovely long lines of light where the sea lies, and where at sunset all the little white and rosy clouds seem to go flocking westward like a flight of birds.

In the middle ages, and maybe even earlier, when Stilicho counselled the making of the adjacent gate, the tower had been a fortress and a fighting-place; later on it had been a dwelling-place, chiefly sought by artists for the sunlit wonder of its view, and its solitude in the centre of the city, and the many legends that had gathered about it, as the owls lived on its roof. It had spacious chambers, painted and vaulted, and some were so high that no single sort of noise from the streets below could reach there, and nothing could be heard save the sound of the birds' wings and the rush of the wind on stormy days amongst the clouds.

To this place after a while she came and lived. When I told her at last of the curious treasure she had inherited, it scarcely seemed to make any impression on her; her first instinct was to

refuse it ; then, when I reasoned with her, she would only take a small part.

“ Keep me enough to live on,” she said, “ and give the rest to the poor.”

From the great goodness of my priestly friend, we had no trouble or interference of any kind, only it was difficult to make her understand or comply with the few formalities that were needful for her entrance into the inheritance of the dead miser.

Amongst other things which had belonged to him, and been secreted by him, were many jewels ; diamonds, large as the eggs of little birds ; and rubies and sapphires uncut. She looked at them, and pushed them away with disgust.

“ Let them be sold,” she said ; “ there are always the poor——”

And, indeed, there are always the poor : the vast throngs born century after century, only to know the pangs of life and of death, and nothing more. Methinks that human life is, after all, but like a human body, with a fair and smiling face, but all the limbs ulcered and cramped and

racked with pain. No surgery of statecraft has ever known how to keep the fair head erect, yet give the trunk and the limbs health.

As time went on she grew thankful to have the needs of life thus supplied to her without effort, for she would have found it difficult to maintain herself; and her old pride, though it had bent to one, changed in nothing to others, and she would have starved sooner than have taken a crust she had not earned. But always she refused to spend more of the stores of the Ghetto than was necessary for her personal and daily wants; and she gave away such large sums and so much treasure, that she left herself barely enough for those wants, simple though they were.

“ The money was wrung from the poor, that I am sure. It shall go back to them,” she said; and if I had not been able to cheat her innocently, and so restrain her hand, she would have been once more amongst those who wake in the morning not knowing whence their daily bread could come.

Rome began to speak of her story, but no one saw her.

“Find me some place where no one will know that I am living,” she said to me. So I found her the old brick tower, with its pines and its old orange-trees behind it, and the owls and the pigeons about its roof, where the wind-sown plants had made a living wreath of green.

I made it as beautiful as I could without letting it show that money had been spent there, for of riches she had a strange horror; and when she saw anything that seemed to her to have cost gold, she said always, “take it away, and sell it for the poor.” For she had something in her, as in the old days we had used to say, of the serenity of the early saints, mingled with all the Pagan force and Pagan graces of her mind and character. And, so far as she thought of them at all, she abhorred the riches of Ben Sulim, because she was sure that oppression and dishonesty and avarice, and all the unpunished sins of the usurer and of the miser, had piled that hoard together.

It were hard to tell the change that had come over her. All the absorption into Art which had once isolated her from the world of others, had

now become equally absorbed into the memory of her love, and a more absolute isolation still. After that night beside the hearth-fire, she never named him. Only once, when, in my loathing of his heartlessness, I let escape me words too furious against him, she stopped me as though I uttered blasphemy.

The great fidelity of hers never waned or wavered. He had forsaken her: she could not see that this could make any change in her own fealty. She lived because he lived, and for no other reason.

Her life indeed was a living death.

When one is young still, and has by nature pure health and strength, actual death does not come as easily as poets picture it. But because the body ails little, and the limbs move without effort, and the pulses beat with regularity, none the less does a living death fall on the senses and the soul; and the days and the years are a long blank waste that no effort can recall or distinguish, and all the sweet glad sights and sounds of the earth are mere pain, as they are to the dying.

And there was no consolation possible for her—for her by whom Rome had been found a ruin, and Love had been found a destroyer. To her all gods were dead: she had no faith on which to lean.

The Farnesiani women who live immured in the walls by the Viminal Hill, murmuring their ceaseless adoration of the Sacrament, where never daylight comes, or voices of friends are heard, or human faces seen, are less desolate, are more blessed than she, for in their living sepulchre they have dreams of an eternal life that shall compensate for all.

But to her this self-deception was not possible. For her the Mother of Angels had no sigh or smile.

Yet there was in her a great tenderness, which had been lacking before; suffering and love had brought to her that sympathy which before had been wanting. She had been pure and truthful, and never unkind; but she had been hard as the marble on which she wrought. Now no kind of pain was alien to her; the woe of others was sacred to her; when she spoke to the hungry

and the naked there were tears in her voice ; when she saw a little child at its mother's breast, an infinite yearning came into her eyes.

So the days and the weeks and the months went on, and she dwelt here in this high tower, undisturbed, and thinking only of one creature. I am sure she had no hope that he would return to her. He had left her alone in her desolation, as Ariadnê was left on Naxos. Only, to her no consolation was possible.

I do not think either that she ever understood the deep wrong that he had done to her. In some way she had wearied him, and he had forsaken her : that she understood. But she cherished the memories of his love as her one chief glory upon earth. She would have said, as Héloïse says in one of her letters :—

“Plus je m'humilias pour toi plus j'espérais gagner dans ton cœur. Si le maître du monde, si l'empereur lui-même, eut voulu m'honorer du nom de son épouse, j'aurais mieux aimé être appelée ta maîtresse que sa femme et son impératrice.”

The world calls this sin. Aye, the world is very wise, no doubt.

It chooses its words well—the world which lets the adulteress pass up the throne-rooms of

courts, and live in the sunshine of prosperity, and bear her jewels on her forehead of brass, and wear the robe of her husband's shame as though it were a garment of righteousness ; but on the woman who has loved greatly, and only loved too well, and has dared be faithful, and knew no solace for love's loss, pours down its burning oil of contumely, whilst it thrusts her to a living tomb, as Rome its vestals.

No doubt the world is wise,—and just.

But she knew nothing of the world. The little she had seen of it in that white gilded city which had made her misery, had filled her with horror. She had felt any look of homage from other eyes than his an infidelity to him. She would have been glad to be unlovely in other's sight to be more utterly his own.

As for me I never asked her anything.

I could imagine without any words the terrible ease with which he had made her believe a great passion pure as religion and divine as martyrdom, and then wearying himself of the very purity and grace of the thing he had invoked, had dropped the veil, and let her see herself and him as others

saw them. He had been, like the magicians of old, who by their spells called up all shapes so beautiful and unearthly, that the magician flung down his crystal and fled appalled from the thing that he had summoned.

I never asked her anything. I served her in all ways I could, as I had done ever since that time when she had come to me in the midday sun with the poppies and the *passiflora* flowers in her hands, and I had awakened from my sleep and said to her, “ Dear,—Love is cruel ; that he always is.”

I was glad and thankful that she knew me well enough never to offer me any of the gold of the dead man : that would have stung me so indeed that I think I could never more have looked upon her face. But she knew me too well ; and I did such service for her as I could, making fit for her the old, dusky, lofty rooms, and finding an honest woman to dwell there, for Ersilia could not leave her own dwelling-house, and going on with my own labours at the corner of the bridge, so as to be no burden to any one.

The poor little Greek boy haunted the place,

and begged so piteously to see her once that I could not deny him. But it hurt her so much that I was fain to hurry him away. She knew nothing of his service to her, and only remembered at the sight of him all the days that were gone :—he was sorely wounded, but he loved her well, and submitted.

“ It is hard ! ”—he said once.

“ It is hard,” said I ; “ all great love is. That is how we tell the true from the false. You would not purchase the right of seeing her at the cost of telling her the debts she owes to you ? ”

“ Ah, no—never, never,” said the poor little lad, who, though timid and false in some ways, in his love of her was courageous and very true ; and he would come at evening time under the walls of the tower and play on his flute, in hopes that the sounds might float up to her and soothe her ; and the women at the fountain would stop in beating their linen, and the dogs would cease barking and come round, and the people at the doorways would pause in their quarrelling and swearing, and the very pigeons seemed to be pleased as they circled round and round before

their good night's sleep—but I doubt if ever she heard.

She never seemed to me either to listen to, or to see, anything that was in the air or around her in the streets—unless it were some misery that she could relieve in any way, or some little child laughing and catching at its mother's hair.

I think the world only held for her one face, and the air only one voice: and wherever she went she saw and heard those.

And though I had promised what Maryx had refused to promise, there were times that I felt that whoever killed Hilarion would do well.

He never came to Rome.

But I think she always hoped with every sun which rose that he might come there, for she would cover herself so that no one could have told whether she were lovely or unlovely, young or old, and would walk to and fro the city hour after hour, day after day, week after week, looking in every face she met; and Rome was only dear to her now because its stones had borne his steps and its waters mirrored his image.

All powers, or thought, of Art, seemed to have

perished in her, and this pained me most of all. It seemed as if when that clay figure had crumbled down into a heap of grey earth in Paris, all the genius in her had passed away with it.

I hoped always that the sight of the marbles would awake it in her once more, as the sight of the tawny Tiber rolling beneath the moon had brought back her reason. But she passed by the noble things that she had worshipped as though they were not there, and looked in the face of the Dioscuri, and knew them not, for any sign she gave. I would have spoken to Maryx and asked his counsel, but I dared not do it. His own fate seemed to me so terrible, and his woe so sacred, that I dared not enter his presence.

He stayed on in Rome: that was all I knew.

Once or twice I went and saw his mother, to whom I dared not speak of Giojà, for she had a peasant's narrowness of judgment, and a mother's bitterness of exclusive love. She grew blind, and had ceased to be able to see the colours of the flowers in the atrium, and the sun shining on the roof of the pope's palace, which had made

her feel she was living in the city of God. But she could still see the face of her son, and could read what it told her, though she saw it through the mist of failing sight.

“ It is as I said,” she repeated for the hundredth time. “ It is as I said. The marble has fallen on him and crushed him; it fell on his father’s breast, it has fallen on his heart: that is all. He thought he had mastered it: but you see——”

For the marble was to her a real and devilish thing; bearing blows in subjection many a year, to rise and crush its hewer at the last.

“ If he had only made the image of the true God!”—she said, and told her beads. She had in her the firm belief and the intense hatred which made the monks and nuns of the early monastic ages rend out the eyes and bruise the bosom of the pagan deities, and obliterate with axe and knife the laughing groups of Hours and of nymphs.

“ Does he work?” I asked Giulio.

“ Since he came back—never,” the old man answered me, and I was afraid to ask to see him,

and went out of the light lovely house where the roses were pushing between the columns, and the nightingales sang all the long spring nights.

For it was spring now once more.

“ You are cruel to Maryx, my dear,” I said, timidly to her that evening, for I felt timid with her, being ever afraid to touch some wound.

“ He would hurt him,” she said, under her breath, and her face flushed and grew white again.

I knew that it would be useless to urge her. I think that it was, without her knowing it, her sense of the love of Maryx which made her heart harden itself like stone to him : for to a woman who loves greatly even the mere utterance of any passion from any other than the one she loves seems a sort of insult, and to hearken to it would be an infidelity.

“ Why did she let the god come to her ; she could have died first,” she had said, long before of Ariadnè ; and she herself would have died, that being her reading of faithfulness. And truly there is no other.

Spring had come, I say, and nowhere is spring more beautiful than here in Rome.

The glad water sparkles and ripples everywhere ; above the broad porphyry basins butterflies of every colour flutter, and swallows fly ; lovers and children swing balls of flowers, made as only our Romans know how to make them ; the wide lawns under the deep-shadowed avenues are full of blossoms ; the air is full of fragrance ; the palms rise against a cloudless sky ; the nights are lustrous ; in the cool of the great galleries the statues seem to smile ; so spring had been to me always ; but now the season was without joy, and the scent of the flowers on the wind hurt me as it smote my nostrils.

For a great darkness seemed always between me and the sun, and I wondered that the birds could sing, and the children run amongst the blossoms—the world being so vile.

The spring brought no change to her ; no change could ever come ; there was the pity of it. She lived on merely because he lived ; she had said the truth ; she could not set the yawning gulf of the grave between herself and him ;

she could not sink into eternal silence whilst his voice was still upon some other's ear, his kiss upon some other's mouth. For all else, life was terrible to her ; and the fever of it began to consume her, and she grew weak and suffered much, though she never complained ; always indifferent to physical pain, she was now as it seemed insensible to it, and her genius seemed dead.

She had bought everything that ever he had written, and she had learned the tongue that they were written in, and night and day she hung over them, and their pages grew blistered and illegible in many places with the scorching tears that fell on them.

Once I found her thus : her eyes gazed at me wearily, and with sad bewilderment.

“I try to see in them what he wished for, and where I failed,” she said, with a piteous humility in her words.

I cursed the books, and him by whom they were written. I could have said to her the truth ; I could have said, “you had no fault save this ; that with you he heard but the

nightingales, and so pined for the jibbering apes!"

But I forbore ; I was afraid lest she should turn to hate me, knowing that I hated him.

Weaker natures than hers would have sought sympathy, and would have suffered shame : she did neither. She was too absolutely pure in the perfectness of her love to be conscious of that shame which is the reflection of the world's reproaches ; there was no "world" for her ; and she had been too used to dwell alone amidst her dreams and her labours to seek for the pity or the pardon of others, or to regret its absence. She had fallen in her own sight, not because he had loved her, but because he had left her ; because she had in some way that she did not understand become of no value, and no honour, and no worth in his sight.

She did not rebel against his sentence, but she loathed herself because she had incurred it. All the lofty, pure, and poetic passion which she had dreamed of in her ignorance over the pages of Dante and Petrareca and Sospitra she had given to him : that she had been nothing, in

truth, higher or better than a toy to him was incomprehensible to this nature which had the purity and the force of Electra and Antigone. In some way she had failed: that was all she knew.

With her he had heard only the nightingales. And in some strange, horrible way, the snakes and the apes had been stronger than she, and to him had been sweeter, and so had drawn him back to them and had left her alone.

That was all she knew.

With an intense pride she had an intense humility. “He loved me once,” she said; and this seemed to her to be a wonder still so great that it excused in him all later cruelty; and, like the woman she once had pitied on the Maremma shore, she would not have wished her wounds less deep, nor their pain less, nor their hideousness less, because those wounds assured her—he had loved her once.

Alas! even this poor and bitter consolation was a self-deception. Even when he had laid his roses on her knees and wooed her first, he had not loved her, not even with such love as that

foul patrician jade wrung from him by treading on his worn heart, as a vine gatherer on the bruised and pressed-out grapes crushed in the vats at autumn.

For so he soon told me, even he, himself, with that cynical frankness which at times broke up from under the soft disguises of his usual words.

He had never come to Rome ; never once since that chill and bitter Lenten night when Maryx and I had found the chamber empty, and Hermes in the moonlight alone.

I, asking always people whom I knew, learned that he had never been in Rome since then, nor ever once at Daila. It was not fear certainly which kept him from the city ; but probably it was that sort of restless but fruitless and vague remorse which is the repentance of such a man as he.

For the difference between good and bad in men lies less, I think, in what they do than in how they feel, and so less in act than conscience ; and many a one amongst us could undo the evil he has done if only he would not push away the pain it causes him, and hurry on leaving the past

behind him like a dead mule on the high road to rot forgotten.

We all sin, but some of us walk on, not looking back, and some of us do look back, and thus do go again over the ill-trodden path, and so, perchance, meet angels on the way—to mend it.

Hilarion never looked back: not because he was altogether cruel, but because he had tenderness sufficient twined in with his cruelty to make him reluctant to see pain, although quite reckless as to causing it. The masters of the world would slay ten thousand victims here in Rome, yet weep sometimes if a beloved slave died: and why?—because they were only Humanity let loose to all its instincts.

I dreaded lest he should come to Rome, for I knew that even such comparative calm as she had attained would be destroyed again, if she could behold his face or hear his footstep on the stones.

I watched for him ceaselessly and in anxiety, but he never came, and I heard that he was in Paris and in other places that he loved, and the vile Sovrana woman was also absent, and the pale sad peace that reigned with us, as it reigns over

a buried village when the snow has covered it, and the fires are out, and the cries stilled, and the sleepers all sleeping forever, was untroubled by any burst of storm or break of dawn.

It was night with us always : night always : even in the golden glory of wide Rome, with the light upon the amethystine hills, and blue aerial distances, and the sound of birds' wings and children's laughter, and the people's gladness, everywhere about the bright broad waters.





CHAPTER VIII.

ONE evening, when a late Easter was quite over, I was carrying home some work that I had done, and I went perforce past the palace of the Sovrana princes ; the palace of his black-browed wanton, who there ruled like Olympia Pamfili, and had the great world all about her ; for she who makes her husband's shame, nowadays can clothe herself with it as with a garment of righteousness ; be her lord only but vile also.

In the shadow of the mighty courtyard of the place, there was a vast crowd of gay grand people coming and going ; amongst them I at length saw Hilarion ; he was entering the house. My heart leapt with a wild bound, as though the blood of only twenty years pulsed in it.

But for my promise to her he would have died with the moment that the moonlight fell on his fair, serene, cold features, and revealed them to me.

I left my errand undone, and waited by the palace gates. It was in the oldest part of Rome—a mighty place built out of travertine, from great ruins, in the middle ages by some pope; just now its courts were alight with lamps and torches, and up the vast stairs one could see the serving men, all red and gold, like strutting parquets standing one above another; no doubt this kind of life must be fine to lead, and I dare-say people in the midst of it very soon forget—unless they wish very much to remember.

I stood outside the gates with sundry other folks, who had come there to stare at the foreign princes and great ladies who alighted and passed up between the men in red and gold.

No one noticed me; a good many hours went by; the people by the gates had long before grown tired of looking on, and had gone away; I was left alone, but I did not stir; there were a fret and fume of the waiting horses all around,

and their breath was like steam on the night ; after a time the people within began to come forth again, amongst the earliest of them he came ; in your great world lovers are careful I believe to preserve this sort of affectation, it saves the honour of the ladies and their lords.

I stopped him as he went out to his equipage.

“ Let me have a word with you,” said I.

He turned, and I think he grew paler ; but he was brave always, and for me, I must say, he had always been gentle in his conduct, and never had made me feel in any way that I was only a cobbler at a street corner, stitching for daily bread.

“ Is it you, old friend ?” he said, with a kindly indifference—real or assumed. “ Do you want me ? It is late. Will not to-morrow do as well ? ”

“ To-morrow will not do,” said I. “ Come out with me.”

And he came, being always brave, as I say, and no doubt seeing some look on my face that told him I was longing for his life.

The palace stood, as I say, in one of the oldest

parts of Rome ; a turn or two of a passage-way, and one was in front of the dome of Agrippa, the gloomiest, grandest thing that the world holds, I think, above all when the moonlight is upon it, as it was on it now.

I walked thence, and he with me ; his attendants remained at a sign from him before the palace.

When there was no one to hear in the deserted place, I stopped ; he also.

He spoke before I could speak.

“ If you were a younger man, you would kill me—would you not ? ”

His blue eyes were serene, and met mine, but his face was troubled.

“ If I had not promised never to harm you, I would find the means to kill you now, old though I may be.”

He looked at me thoughtfully.

“ Whom have you promised ? ”

“ You must know. There cannot be two who, so wronged, would yet forgive.”

He sighed a little restlessly.

“ Is she well ? ” he said, after a pause, and

there was a sort of shame in his voice, and his eyelids fell.

I cursed him.

Heaven be merciful to me a sinner. I called down on his head every blight and vengeance of heaven, all ill and wretchedness and despair that life can ever heap on those whom God and man forsake. I cursed him in his lying down and his uprising, in his manhood and his age ; I cursed all offspring that might be begotten by him, and all women that his love might light on ; I cursed him as in the Scriptures holy men curse the children of hell.

I was wrong, and such curses should blister the lips that utter them, being all weak and at each other's mercy, and all adrift in an inexplicable mystery of existence, as we are. But I was beside myself ; I thought only of her ; I saw only in him the cruel brutality of Love, which in his passion-flower hides an asp, and with his kiss upon the lips gives death.

He stood tranquil and unmoved under the fury of my words, and he showed no resentment ; he shuddered a little once, that was all. He did not

seek to go away. He stood quite quietly by the granite steps of the Pantheon, with the columns behind him that have withstood the fires and the sieges of two thousand years.

When my voice had died, choked in my throat by the force of my own misery and hate, he looked at me, with his clear cold eyes dim.

“I am sorry that you should hate me,” he said, under his breath, “but you are right—as you see things. And why do you call on any god? Rome has outlived them all.”

The patience in him, and the serenity, quelled the tempests of my fury and my loathing, as answering, passion would have fed them. I stood stock-still, and stared on him, in the moonlight.

“Can one never hurt you!” I muttered to him. “Are you brute, or devil, or what, that you feel nothing, and only stand and smile—like that?”

“Did I smile?” said Hilarion. “Nay—you hurt me when you hate me. It is natural that you should, and just enough; only, when you call on God—! Has ever He listened?”

“No! since He never kept her from you—
No!”

“Who shall keep the woman from the man?” said he, with a sort of scorn. “Nature will not; and it is Nature alone that is strong.”

“I blame not your love; I am no puritan; what I curse in you is your bitter coldness of soul, your deception, your faithlessness, your cruelty, your abandonment; how could you leave her, once having loved her—how?”

“I never loved her,” he said, wearily. “What said Anakreon in your dream? Instead of Eros it is Philotès. It is a bitter truth.”

I groaned aloud.

The clay that she had spent her force on in her delirium in Paris, was more real, more worthy worship, than this phantom of passion, which had led her on to perish!

“I am ashamed—I regret!” he muttered hurriedly, with a true contrition for the moment in his voice. “Why did you ask me to leave her alone? And then one saw that Maryx loved her: that was a temptation the more. Do I seem base to you? Men always do whenever they

speak the truth. Yet it was not only baseness—no. Such purity with such passion as hers I never knew. She never understood I did her wrong; she only loved me. She was so calm, too, so like the old statues and the old fancies of the immortals, with eyes that never seemed likely to weep or smile or look anywhere except straight to their home in heaven. I never had seen a woman like that——”

“Therefore you were not content until you had made her like to others !”

“She never became so—never,” he said quickly. “I may have ruined her as you and the world call ruin; but, as I live here, I swear I left her soul unsullied. Coarse words would have cancered one’s tongue, spoken to her ! One night I took her to the opera in Paris—only one. It seemed like dragging Athene through a bagnio ; a mere man’s look at her seemed insult.”

“You could feel that ! And yet——”

“Aye, and yet I forsook her, you would say. Because of that ; can you not understand ? She was a constant shame to me ! If you had poured out poison to a creature trusting you,

and she kissed you as she drank it, and thought each throe it caused her sweet because the hurt was from you, could you bear that? It was so with us. She stung me always, not meaning; and then I tired——”

“ You cannot think it of me that I would desert a woman brutally, and a woman so young,” he said after a pause, with an impatience and apology in his tone, for it hurt him, that such as I, or any one indeed, could deem him guilty of such kind of grossness in his cruelty.

“ I was faithless; I left her—yes; but I meant to return. I thought she would more easily understand that one might weary—of course I never dreamed that she would flee away to misery like that——”

“ No, I remember!” I answered him, bitterly. “ You said of old, when you buried a dead love you cast some rich gifts on its grave, as the Romans the porca præsentanea. Well, you see there are dead things you cannot bury so, and there are things that will not die at all, not even at your bidding. You are a famous poet, but it

seems to me that you are but a shallow student of great natures."

"She will love me always you mean—yes."

"You dare to triumph?"

"No, I meant no triumph. There are women like that,—they make one dread lest ever there should be the endless Hereafter that we wise men laugh at. How should we bear their eyes?"

A shiver shook him as he walked to and fro in the moonlight.

"Tell me more of her," he said, pausing before me.

"I will tell you nothing."

"You think me so unworthy?"

"I think any one of the galley slaves that toil in the gangs, with their crimes written on their breasts, better and honester than you—yes."

He was silent; the moonlight poured down between us white and wide; there lay a little dead bird on the stones, I remember, a redbreast, stiff and cold. The people traffic in such things here, in the square of Agrippa; it had fallen, doubtless, off some market stall.

Poor little robin! All the innocent sweet wood-

land singing-life of it was over, over in agony, and not a soul in all the wide earth was the better for its pain, not even the huckster who had missed making his copper coin by it. Woe is me ; the sorrow of the world is great.

I pointed to it where it lay, poor little soft huddled heap of bright feathers ; there is no sadder sight than a dead bird, for what lovelier life can there be than a bird's life, free in the sun and the rain, in the blossom and foliage ?

“ Make the little cold throat sing at sunrise,” I said to him. “ When you can do that, then think to undo what you have done.”

“ She will forget :—”

“ You know she never will forget. There is your crime.”

“ She will have her art——”

“ Will the dead bird sing ?”

He was silent.

“ Tell me,” he said abruptly, after a little while, “ tell me, is she here in Rome ?”

I would not answer him ; I stared on him stupidly, seeing his pale fair face in all its

beauty against the granite columns of Agrippa's temple.

"Is she in Rome?" he asked.

"I will not tell you."

"Then she is! When I learned in Paris that you had found her, I knew that she was safe. You thought I drove her away. You do me wrong. I left her indeed—but I would have returned. I wrote to her to try and make her see that one might weary, still not be a brute; how could I tell that she would take it so? My servants should have sought her, they might have known that I had no intention to drive her from me; not like that. When I reached Paris, then I sought for her, but then you had been there, and had gone; I recognised that it was you by what they said,—you had found her in wretchedness?"

"She kept herself by making fishermen's nets—yes."

I would not tell him all the truth; I could not bear that he should know that her lovely and lofty mind had lost itself in the fell gloom of madness for his sake.

He moved impatiently with a gesture of shrinking and regret.

Hilarion could inflict all tortures of the emotions on a woman, and forsake her, and feel no pang; but physical need in any woman hurt him, and the thought that it was suffered for him, or through him, stung him sharply; in his code his honour was hurt if the creature he had caressed could want for bread. She might die of pain, or drag out a living death in solitude; but that was nothing. That did not touch his honour, not in any way.

“Does she want—now?” he said, with a tinge of ashamed agitation in his cheek. “Does she want? Surely she must. And I—”

“She wants for nothing,” I answered him; “and my patience I cannot answer for: not if you insult her—so. Words are no use; I came to say to you, ‘Go out of Rome.’ Do not outrage her with the sight of you beside that patrician jade in the palace yonder; break with that Jezebel, and go to what other vile woman you will,—only not *here*.”

Hilarion laughed a little drearily.

“Jezebel as you call her has the wit to sting me, and burn me, whenever she touches me; so she keeps me. Men are made so. Jezebel makes me a beast in my own sight, and a fool in the sight of men; still she keeps me. Why? I do not know very well. What is the sorcery of shameless women? Who can tell? But a sorcery it is. History tells you that.”

“Will you leave your adulteress? That is all I care to know.”

“If *she* be here,” he said softly; yet for this jade he had forsaken her!

“Tell me of her,” he said again.

“Do you regret her?”

“Yes,—and no. I seem brutal to you, no doubt. But I could not live beside her; Jezebel suits me far better.”

“What fault had she?”

“The worst; she loved me too well. Do you not see? It was a perpetual reproach.”

He was silent; his face was troubled and ashamed, and he moved impatiently away.

“Can you not understand? To be thought faithful, faultless, half divine; and all the time one knows—oh! say it is thanklessness and worthlessness in one, no doubt it is; but men are made so. There are women that all the time one works one’s will on them, make one ashamed.”

“And so one does worse?”

He threw his head back with a gesture of irritation.

“And leaves them? Is that worse? One cannot live in air too rarified; we are but brutes, as nature made us. That is not our fault. Not that I meant to leave her long, only she took it so. She could not understand.”

No, she could not understand.

It seemed to me that never word more pitiful had been spoken. She could not understand that Love was mortal.

He had walked to the edge of the fountain; the moon shone on the water, and the water reflected the pale and troubled beauty of his face.

“We are faithful only to the faithless, you once said,” he muttered, turning back from the water

that mirrored him. “ That is true. Who is it says that we are happiest with light and venal women because we are not ashamed to be with them the mere beasts that nature made us ? Montaigne, I think. It is true. And besides that, with her, every little lie I told her—such lies as one must always tell to women—seemed to sting me as I said it. She never doubted me ! If she had doubted me once, it would have been easy ; but she always believed—always. In Venice she made her marble in my likeness, but made me a god. That was her fault always. She never saw me as the thing I am ! ”

He sighed ; a sigh selfish and restless.

“ Would you have the truth, the whole truth ? ” he said, as with an effort. “ Well, then—I never loved her ; I tell you I never loved her—No ! She was so lovely, and had so much genius, and she was so unlike all others, and she was so utterly at peace, so given over to her art and dreams, so still, so far away—I wanted to destroy it all. Oh, not from any vileness—men are not vile ; they are only children ; when children see a flower they must

root it up ; a frost-crystal, they must snatch and break it ; I was a child and cruel : children are cruel. Passion is brutal, too ; but it is strong and constant. I had not passion. I said to myself she shall care for me and not her art ; but I never should have said it if she had not looked so far away from earth and all its follies. I never loved her ; no ! One must be hurt to love ; she never hurt me.”

Oh, terrible words and terrible truth ; he had hurt her as he would, and she alone of the two had been faithful.

He ascended the steps of the temple, and walked to and fro wearily, for his conscience stirred and smote him.

“ Was it vanity ? ” he muttered. “ Perhaps it was vanity ! It was not love. Something of love—its amorous charm, of course—came into it ; for she was so lovely in body and mind, and she worshipped me as never other creature ever did, I think ; but for the rest—I never should have touched her if you had not cautioned me, and if she had not had those deep, serene, abstracted eyes of hers, that seemed

to be always seeing heaven and to pass by men. One longed to call up one's own image in them, as in calm waters, and trouble them for ever!—do you not know? You call that base?—Well you are right, maybe. It was so. I cared but little for her, but I wished to be the first. Perhaps I was a coward, and treacherous, as you say: I did not think of that. She loved her art, her gods, her dreams; I said to myself she should love me. I never had met a woman with a pure soul; hers was quite pure; I wrote my name across it out of sport, and you see the name burns there in fire always;—well it may."

He had not even loved her! He who had taught her that imperishable love which possesses the body and the soul, and fills all earth and heaven, and lets no living thing reign beside it for a moment, nor any thought obtain a place!

"You never loved her?" I muttered. "You never loved her? You who wrote your name, as you say, across her very soul, so that it burns there always, and will burn on, and on, and on, so

that God Himself could not quench the flame of it, even if He would. You never loved her!—you!"

It seemed to me the pitifulest thing that ever the ear of man could hear; it stunned me.

Across my brain ran a line I once had read in some coarse cruel book:—

"Les femmes ne savent pas distinguer l'appétit de l'amour."

Was great Love nowhere in the world save here and there in some woman's breaking heart?—Was Philotès the only thing men knew?

I could speak no more to him; the unutterable desolation of it struck me dumb. I felt as in that very spot some pagan Roman might have felt, seeing his daughter passing by between the guards to perish for the love of Christ, he knowing all the while that her Christ was dead in Galilee, and could not aid her, and that the angelic hosts she waited for to break the wheel and quench the fires, had never had a shape or substance, save in the heated fancy of some desert saint or hunted preacher.

He laughed a little, partly in cruelty and far more in sadness, and looked me full in the face.

“If you were a young man you would kill me.”

I looked him also full in the face.

“If I had not promised her never to kill you, I would find the means to do it now—old as I am.”

“You would do quite right,” he said dreamily, “and, perhaps, you would do me a service: who can tell? We know so little.”

Alas no:—he said, truly; we know so little, and it cripples our hand; the worst vengeance we can think of is a swift, sure blow that deals out death, and then, perhaps, all the while we only summon man’s best friend.

I stood before him baffled, impotent, paralyzed.

The merciless frankness of him froze the very current of my blood, and I saw that he spoke the truth. He had not even loved her once.

He had better loved this blackbrowed illustrious jade here in Rome, who struck him in her furies, and dragged him in the dust in her soft moments.

“Will you tell me where she is?” he said abruptly once more.

“No, I will not.”

“Are you afraid that I should make her return to me?”

“No: your vanity has nothing more to gain.”

“I should have gone back to her.”

“You think so. But you would not.”

“Why?”

“Because you know that though she may never look upon your face again, none the less is she yours for ever. Since men are faithful only to the faithless, what is true to them they can easily forsake.”

He was silent.

There was a mist like tears in his eyes.

“She loved me too much, I tell you: no man should ever be loved much,” he said, impatiently. “It wearies us, and it makes us too sure. Women will not understand,—”

“Base women understand that well; and, understanding, keep you and such as you. Go to them.”

Then I turned, and would have gone away.
But he overtook me.

“I respect you, because you would kill me.
Cannot we part in peace? Is there nothing
that I could do?”

“No. There is nothing. When men do what
you have done, God himself could do nothing.
You must know that. As for peace there can be
none between us. Farewell: when you lie
dying, maybe you will wish that Love were
beside you, and you will call on it, and call in
vain.”

Then without other words I left him.





CHAPTER IX.

I LEFT him and went away by myself from the Pantheon homeward to the chamber by the bridge where Hermes and all other treasures of my past were missing.

I knew that he would go out of Rome ; I knew that he would not seek her ; because, although his heart in a manner smote him, thinking of her so near, and knowing himself so beloved, yet the desire of ease and the dislike of pain were stronger emotions with him than any other. She was so utterly his own : though lands and seas had stretched between them, and half a world had parted them, none the less, he knew well enough—too well,—would she be faithful ; never, though she were left alone till her youth should flee away and grey age come, never would any

other gain from her a moment's thought or a passing glance: he knew.

Why should he return to her?—his passion had nothing to conquer, his vanity nothing to gain. And what did he know of love?—this poet with words that burned as they sang, this lover with eyes that caressed as they looked, till the souls of women dropped in his path like jessamine flowers when the wind passes.

“I had never left Dorothea had she refused me her trust,” says the lover who is faithless, in a play of Calderon’s.

Never was line written that embodied sadder truth; and Dorothea forgives outrage on outrage, crime on crime, and even when he has bidden assassins slay her, would still kiss his hand and pray for him to the Christ on her cross; but *he* never forgives:—though against him she has no fault, save the one fault of having had faith in him.

“If you love me you will listen to me!” prays the man to the woman; and she listens: “You should have turned your ear from me!” says the man when it is too late.

Not because he is vile ; no. Hilarion said justly ; very few men are that ; but because he is like a child, and his plaything was beautiful whilst yet it was a refused secret, a treasure withheld, a toy untried, but being once attained and owned, the plaything lies forgotten in a corner, whilst the player runs forth in the sun.

Calderon's Dorothea was not hated because she had given her trust, but she was forsaken because she had done so, and then hated because the memory of wrong done to her stung a fickle fierce heart to remorse.

“ Who has done the wrong, never pardons : ” in love, beyond all else, is this true.

Hilarion went back to the apes in his upas tree, because they never made him wish himself other than he was ; they never recalled to him all he might have been : innocently she had done both. So he had left her.

I knew, as I say, that he would go out of Rome ; and on the morrow I learned that he had done so.

I was thankful. Women hope that the dead love may revive ; but men know that of all

dead things none are so past recall as a dead passion.

The courtezan may scourge it with a whip of nettles back into life ; but the innocent woman may wet it for ever with her tears, she will find no resurrection.

I was thankful, for it was best so ; yet if I could have hated him more than I did it would have been for his obedience to me.

To be near her, yet not even look upon her face !—I forgot that hardly could he care to look on it much more than a murderer cares to look on the thing he has stifled and thrust away into the earth. “Why could he not have left her in peace ?” I said, again and again. No doubt he often asked himself so ; for men are not base ; they are children.

Maryx all this while I never saw. I believed that although he had refused to give his promise, he would not harm her lover for her sake ; but I knew nothing : I only knew that Hilarion passed out of Rome, as he had entered it, in safety.

The nightingales sang through all the long lovely springtide nights under the myrtles on the

Golden Hill, but their master never came out to hear them, nor heeded that the summer drew nigh.

Art is an angel of God, but when Love has entered the soul, the angel unfolds its plumes and takes flight, and the wind of its wings withers as it passes. He whom it has left misses the angel at his ear, but he is alone for ever. Sometimes it will seem to him then that it had been no angel ever, but a fiend that lied, making him waste his years in a barren toil, and his nights in a joyless passion; for there are two things beside which all Art is but a mockery and a curse: they are a child that is dying and a love that is lost.

Meanwhile she grew thinner and thinner and taller still, as it seemed, and the colourless fairness of her face had the pallid whiteness of the stephanotis flower, and she was lovely still, but it was a loveliness which had a certain terror in it for those who saw her, though such were only the poor of the city.

“She has the look of our Beatrice,” said one woman who cleaned the stone stairs of Barberini,

sometimes, and knew those haunting eyes that have all the woe of all creation in their appeal.

And what to me was the most hopeless sorrow of all was this, that every memory and impulse of art seemed extinct in her. What had once been the exclusive passion of her life seemed to have been trodden down and stamped out by the yet more absolute and yet more tyrannical passion which had dethroned it; as a great storm wave rises, and sweeps over, and effaces, all landmarks and dwellings of the earth wherever it reaches, so had the passion of Hilarion swept away every other thought and feeling.

The sickness and the sorrow round her she would do her best to help, going from one to another, silent and afraid of no pestilence. The people were afraid of her, but she was never so of them, even when the breath of their lips was death.

To the little children she was very tender, she, who had never seemed even to see that the children played in the sun, or smiled at their mother's bosoms; and she would touch them gently, and a great anguish would come into her eyes, that now were always so wistful, and strained

and full of hopeless longing, like the eyes of a captive animal.

“ You must love these people that you serve them so,” said a priest to her one day, meeting her where the pestilence raged.

“ No,” she answered him, “ I am only sorry for them. I am sorry for anything that lives.”

And it was the truth. Her heart had opened to pity, but it was closed to all save one love.

It was a summer heavy and sickly. Wan, fever-worn children glided through the streets; the little bell, that told of passing souls needing the church’s sacraments, rang ceaselessly; by daylight and by torchlight the black figures of the beccamorti passed along the beautiful, solemn, empty ways, where the sun burned and the dust drifted; the heat lay on the city like a pall, and the wide, scorched, yellow plain was like a basin of brass beneath the unchanging pale blue of the sky.

For myself I had borne such seasons before, and had been unharmed; but for her I was anxious. Yet she seemed to feel no change in the weather, nor in the aspect of the city around

her ; she was vaguely oppressed, and would lie for hours motionless in the darkened rooms, and would drag herself outward with effort, only if she heard of any in need ; but she never made any lament. To physical discomfort she had always been indifferent, and I think of it now she was insensible.

In the heats of summer I would have had her take some sort of change, but, as before, she refused to leave Rome.

“ It is here that he will seek me if he want me —ever,” she said ; and I, thinking of the cruel truths that he had uttered in the moonlight by the Temple of Agrippa, felt my very heart grow cold.

“ Oh, my dear ! oh, my child ! you perish for a dream,” I said, and dared say no more.

She smiled faintly, a smile that hurt one more than other women’s weeping.

“ In your dream Love brought the poppy flowers, but that I do not understand. How *can* one die while what one loves still lives ? To lie a dead thing in the cold, and the dark, while others——”

A shudder shook her ; the Greek-like temper

in her recoiled from the Christian horrors of the grave. With him she would have gone to her grave as a child to its mother; but without him—if she were dead under the sod, or walled in the stones of a crypt, it seemed to her that she would wake and rise, when the lips of others touched him.

Alas! alas! she never thought of him save as alone. She never knew what were those apes which jabbered in the bay tree of his fame and passions. He was still sacred to her, with the sublime sanctity of a great love which enfolds the thing it cherishes as with the divine mist, which of old veiled the gods.

Whoever can still love thus is happy—aye, even in wretchedness, even when alone. It is when the mist has dissolved, as the mists of the morning, and the nakedness and the deformity and the scars which it hid are disclosed, it is then, and then only, that we are miserable beyond all reach of solace, and can have no refuge but in the eternal oblivion of that death which then we know can be only a forgetting and an end, without hope.

She stayed all the summer in Rome.

One day a thought struck me. It was early in the morning, and the heaviness of the weather had lifted a little, a few showers having fallen, and it was just so golden and white and sunny a morning as that when I had fallen asleep before the *Ariadne* in *Borghese*, with rosy mists upon the mountain heights, and breadths of amber light upon the river, and tender little clouds that flew before the breeze and promised rain at sunset.

A thought struck me, and I allured her into the open air while yet it was very early, and bent her steps—she not heeding whither she went—across the *Tiber* to the *Scala Regia* of the *Vatican*.

“Come hither with me ; I have business here,” I said to her ; and she came, not hearing at all most probably, for her mind was almost always plunged so deeply into the memories of her dead joy that it was easy to guide her where one would.

Sometimes I fancied she had not wholly yet all clearness of her reason ; but there I was

wrong ; she was quite sane, only she had but one thought night and day.

They knew me well at that mighty place, and had always orders to let me pass.

I took her up the immense stairways that seem builded for some palace of Hercules, and the wide, still solemn passages and corridors, where all the arts of the whole world's innumerable centuries seem to be so near one, from the golden crowns of the Etruscan Larthia to the flower garlands of Raffaelle's scholars.

I took her into the galleries which she had never entered since the days when she had studied there the humblest yet the proudest of Art's acolytes. It was eight in the morning ; there was no one near ; the vast chambers seemed countless like the centuries they held embalmed. We went past the sarcophagi and the stones from the tombs, past the colossal heads and the cinerary urns ; past the vases of porphyry and agates and chalcedony, and the deep, serene-eyed faces of the gods, and so into the Chiaramonti gallery ; past the Gannymede of Leucares and the colossal Isis, and the olive presses

of the Nonii, to the spot where what I had once owned was standing, between the radiated jasper of the Assyrian basin, and the yellow marble of the Volscian Jove; near the grand bust of Cæsar as high pontiff, and the sculptured legend of Alkestis, which Evhodus has inscribed to his “very dear and very blessed wife, Metilia Acte.” For there *is* love which lives beyond the tomb.

There my Hermes was, well companioned and better sheltered than with me, beneath those noble arched roofs, amidst those endless processions of gods and of heroes, and of emperors; but for myself, you know, as I have said, it always seemed to me that the smile had passed off the mouth of the statue.

Of course it was a foolish and vain fancy; for what could a few years spent in a poor man’s chamber matter to a creature endowed with that splendid life of marbles which counts by centuries and cycles, and sees whole dynasties and nations roll away?

She walked with me down the long gallery, cold even in the midsummer morning; and she

looked neither to right nor left, but into vacancy always, for she saw nothing that was around her, or at the least cared not for it, because all memories of the art she had adored seemed to have perished in her. I laid my hand upon her shoulder, and made her pause before the Mercury. I said to her :

“Look. He was a friend to you once. Will you pass him by now ? ”

She lifted her eyes with an effort, and rested them on the pentelic stone of the statue.

Hermes' head was slightly bent downward, like that most beautiful Hermes of the Belvidere.

His gaze seemed to meet hers.

A thrill ran through her. She stood and looked upward at the calm, drooped face.

“It is your Greek god ! ” she said, and then was still, and there seemed to fall on her that strange, mystical, divine tranquillity which does lie in the glance of all great statues, whether from the rude sphynx that lies couchant in the desert, or the perfect godhead that was brought to Rome from the seashore by Antium.

Its own calm seemed to fall upon her.

Then hot tears filled her eyes, and fell slowly down her pale cheeks.

“Once I too could make the marbles speak!” she murmured; and her fainting soul stirred in her, and awoke to a sense of its own lost power.

She did not ask how it was that Hermes was here in the palace of the pope—not then; she stood looking at the statue, and seeming, as it were, slowly to gather from it remembrance and strength, and the desires of art, and the secrets of art’s creation.

That desire of genius which in the artist never wholly dies, and makes the painter in the swoon of death behold golden horizons and lovely cities of the clouds, and the musician hear the music of the spheres, and the poet rave of worlds beyond the sun; that desire, or instinct, or power, be it what it will, awoke in her at the feet of Hermes; Hermes, who had seen all her effort and watched all her dreams, and been the silent witness of those first kisses of passion which had burned away her genius beneath them.

She sat down by the zacchus of the statue, on the great lion's head, that bore, with three others like it, the burden of the oval jasper basin.

She was lost in thought. I did not speak to her. The early light of morning streamed through the length of the gallery. Her face had the pained bewilderment of one who, after long unconsciousness and exhaustion, recovers little by little the memories and the forces of life.

Here, if anywhere in the “divine city of the Vatican”—for in truth a city and divine it is, and well has it been called so—here, if anywhere, will wake the soul of the artist; here, where the very pavement bears the story of Odyssus, and each passage-way is a *Via Sacra*, and every stone is old with years whose tale is told by hundreds or by thousands, and the wounded Adonis can be adored beside the tempted Christ of Sistine, and the serious beauty of the Erythean Sybil, lives beside the laughing grace of ivy-crowned Thalia, and the Jupiter Maximus frowns on the mortals made of earth's dust, and the Jehovah who has called forth woman meets the first smile of Eve.

A Divine City indeed, holding in its innumerable chambers and its courts of granite and of porphyry all that man has ever dreamed of, in his hope and in his terror, of the Unknown God.

She sat quite still a long while, while the sunbeams came in from on high, and the grave guardians of the place paced behind the grating. There was no sound at all anywhere, except the sound of the distant water falling in the gardens without, farther away beyond the home of the Muses and of the Apollo Musagetes.

Then suddenly she rose and looked again at the statue.

“This has lived two thousand years and more, and men still say it is beautiful. I tried to make such a statue of him, so that his beauty should live always. I will try once more. Other women could not do that. Perhaps the world will praise it, and he will see it, and then he will know——”

Know how well she loved him still! Ah, that he knew too well! Men like Hilarion never distrust their own power to keep what once

is theirs. Only after a little they do not want it ; so they leave it—that is all.

“ Let us go home,” she said with eager haste, the first sign of eagerness that I had seen in her since I had brought her to the Tiber’s side. “ Let us go home. I will work there in the tower. You shall get me marble—the old marble of Luna, the Etruscan marble—and I will try ; then perhaps the world will keep it as it has kept Hermes ; and me they will forget, but him never. It is the statues that live, not the sculptor.”

And then for a moment, in that loneliness of the Chiaramonte, she leaned against the Greek god, and laid her lips to his cold pure limbs, as she had done to the stones of the hearth in my chamber.

“ He used to caress you,” she murmured to the marble. “ Dear god, give me strength ! ”

Then we went silently through the Braccio Nuovo, past the bronze Augustus, fit master of the world, and Titus’s hive of honey ; between the Corinthian columns and past the pillars of red granite, over the mosaics of the shining floor, and so through many halls and corridors into the

open air of the gardens. It was early morning, and the birds were astir in the thick walls of the clipped box and ilex ; blue butterflies flew over the old Latin tombstones ; lizards ran in between the blossoming orange-hedges ; here and there a late-fallen fruit had tumbled, a ball of gold, upon the grass.

These gardens are green valleys full of fragrance and shadow ; behind them, like their mountain alp, is the great dome, altering from white to purple, as the day passes and the clouds change.

“ Tell me,” she said, below her breath, as we paced amongst the trees, “ why is the Hermes there ? I can remember nothing, only——”

Walking between the tall walls of leaf and bough, I took courage and told her of the things that I had done and the sorrow I had suffered since I had seen the sail upon the sea.

For the first time she wept for us, not for him.

“ And I am thankless—only thankless ! ” she murmured. “ Oh, why love me so much, you two for whom I have no love ! ”

I heard the birds singing in the orange-

flowers, and the bees hum in the fountain's edge, and they only sounded sad and harsh to me.

"My dear, love is given, not bought," I said to her. "That is all."





CHAPTER X.

THAT very night I made a sculptor's workroom in the tower, and I had brought thither the earths and planes and tools of the glyptic art, and once more that desire to create entered into her without which the soul which has been once possessed by it is dumb as a flute without the breath of man, is empty as a temple whose gods have been overthrown.

The passion which consumed her would at least find some vent and solace in this—so I thought; even if, as I feared greatly, the genius in her might no more revive than can a flower that has been scorched by the noon sun and then frozen by the night. I did not know how this might prove; any way, obedient to her wish, I placed within her reach all the material neces-

saries of sculpture, and left her alone to summon what vision she would. Alas! no visions were possible to her now—on the silver of the sunlight, as on the blackness of the darkness, she saw only one face.

Shut in her tower, where only the pigeons saw her, flying about the high casements to their homes in the roof, she held communion with that art which now was in her only another form of love. In the marbles she only saw his features and his form: as the soft winds touched her cheek, she thought of his kisses; when the stars shone on her, she thought only of his eyes;—love is an absolute possession of all the senses and all the soul, or it is nothing.

Therefore there are few who know love: as there are few who are great, or do heroic deeds, or know or attain to anything which demands intensity of character.

“Do not enter there,” she said to me, meaning this highest place under the roof, where the sun shone on the clay and the stones. “If I can content myself—ever—then I will tell you. But it escapes me——;” and she would sit for hours

silent and looking into vacancy, striving, no doubt, to recall that power which had passed away from her; that mystical power of artistic creation which is no more to be commanded than it can be explained.

Sometimes I was half afraid of what I had done, for she grew weaker and more feverish, it seemed to me and would not stir from the place in the heavy torrid weather, when the very dogs in the streets could scarcely drag their limbs from sun to shadow; and sometimes I could have beaten out my brains against the wall because I had had that accursed dream in Borghese, and now had to watch its slow fulfilment and could do nothing: for the Roman woman had said, justly, “Either the temple of Lubentina, or death.”

There was no middle course between the two. And who could wish her less faithful even to the faithless, since by fidelity alone is love lifted from the beast into the god?

So months passed by, and she remained all the long empty days shut there with the dumb clays and the Carrara marbles, that would lie there

blocks of poor pale stone, till she could bid them arise and speak.

Sometimes the artist's creation is spontaneous, electric, full of sudden and eager joys, like the birth of love itself: sometimes it is accomplished only with sore travail, and many pangs and sleepless 'nights, like the birth of children. Whether the offspring of joy or of pain be the holiest and the strongest, who shall say?—is our lady of San Sisto or the Delphic Sibyl worth the most?

All this time I never saw the one whose pleasure it had been to teach her the gladness of laborious days, and all the secrets of the arts that say to the wood and the stone, “tell men the vision we have had of heaven.” He did not summon me, and I did not dare to seek him.

I saw the old mother, who grew quite blind, and who struck her staff at the empty air, and said to me: “So would I strike the girl were she here; was she blind like me that she could not see a great life at her feet?”

One night Giulio, the foreman, said to me, “the master has been ill; we were very afraid.”

It seemed that the fever of our city, which had

never touched Maryx once in all the five-and-twenty years which had passed since he had first stood by the white lions in the portico of Villa Medicia, had taken hold on him in this unhealthy and burning summer.

I suppose the fever comes up from the soil ;—our marvellous soil that, like the water of our springs and fountains, never changes take it away or shut it up as you may, and bears such lovely luxuriance of leaf and blossoms ;—because the earth here has all been so scorched through and through with blood, and every handsbreadth of its space is as it were a sepulchre, and the lush grass, and the violets that are sweeter here than ever they are elsewhere, and all the delicious moist hanging mosses and herbs and ferns are, after all, so rich, because born from the bodies of virgins and martyrs, and heroes, and all the nameless millions that lie buried here.

Blood must have soaked through the soil deeper than any tree can plunge its roots :—ten thousand animals would be slaughtered in the circus in a day, not to speak of men :—however, come whence it may, the fever, that even Horace

feared, is here always, and terrible in our Rome, above all, when the first great rains come ; and at last, after letting him go free of it five-and-twenty years, the fever had struck down Maryx.

But he had never lain down under it nor seen any physician ; it had only wasted and worn him, as the slow fire at the roots wastes and wears the trunk of a doomed tree, that the charcoal-burners have marked : that was all.

I had not dared to go to him, but one night when I sat by my stall, with Palés sleeping, and the lamp swinging, and the people standing or lying about to get a breath of air, though no air was there under the sultry skies, Maryx touched me on the shoulder. He was very enfeebled, he leaned upon a stick, and his face was pale and haggard, and the look of age, of old age, had deepened on his face, whilst yet he was in the prime of his manhood.

I rose and looked in his face, for indeed before him I felt always so much remorse, that I felt as a criminal in his presence ; I, who had dared to meddle with Fate and compel it.

“ I am grieved ”—I began to him, and then I

could not end the phrase, for all words seemed so trite and useless between him and me, and like an insult to him.

“I know,” he said gently. “Yes; I have been ill; it does not matter. For the first time I have been glad that my mother was blind.”

“I did not dare to ask to see you.”

“No, I understand. He has been in Rome?”

“Yes; months since.”

“I knew. Tell her I broke my oath for her sake. I shut myself in my house. If I had seen him,—”

His lips closed with no more spoken, but there was no necessity for words.

I told him what had passed between me and Hilarion by the church of Agrippa. He heard in silence, sitting on the bench from which I had risen. The blood rose over his wasted features, pale with the terrible pallor of dark skins.

When I had ended he smiled a little drearily.

“That is the love that women choose—God help them!”

Then he was silent, and as the lamp-light fell

on him, I thought his face looked darker, wearier, older than it had done a few moments earlier. For there is nothing more piteous than the waste of a great nature which gives all its gold ;— to see dross preferred.

“ He was kinder to the dog he slew ! ” he said, and he drew his breath heavily and with labour, as he spoke.

“ And the dog—he regretted,” I answered, for my heart was hard as a flint against Hilarion, and I would fain have heard another curse him as I cursed him.

But the hatred of Maryx was too deep for words ; and beyond even his hate was his infinite yearning of pity for her and the sickness of loathing that filled his soul. To one who had loved her with a lover’s love, her fate was horrible as it could not be even to me, an old man, and only her friend.

He sat still in the light of my poor dull lamp, and the people went by and he saw nothing of them, and the water fell down from the wall behind him, and looked like gleaming sabres crossed.

“I would not promise,” he muttered, very low: “but I will hold my hand while I can. She told me—I have no right!”

That had been the bitterest word that she had uttered to him: he had no right, none upon earth; he who had lost all peace, all ambition, all art, all happiness, through her; and for her would have lost the world and his own soul.

“We have no right, you and I,” he said once more, and then he rose up with that dreary dejection of movement which makes the limbs drag like leaden weights when the spirit within is broken.

“She wants for nothing?” he asked abruptly.

“Nothing that we can give.”

“If I can serve her, come to me. If not, let her forget that I live, whilst I do live. This fever kills in time, they say. I shall not complain when the time comes. Good-night.”

Then his hand, which was dry and hot with the malady within him, pressed mine, and he went away slowly, walking with bent head, as old men do.

I thought of the day when he had come past my board with vigorous, elastic steps, and his bold, brilliant eyes, bright as an eagle's; the day when he had taken up the Wingless Love.

Alas, what love that is love indeed bears wings? Love that is love is fettered where it is born, and stirs not, even under any rain of blows.

“Maryx is ill,” I said to her on the morrow.

“I am sorry,” she said, and looked pained.

“Will you not see him?—say some gentle word?”

“I cannot, to be faithful.”

“Faithful to the faithless! That is asked of none.”

Her face gathered upon it that look of resolution and of force which made its delicate lines severe, as the features of the Athene to whom her youth had been dedicated. The flush of a deep emotion, that in another would have been shame, but in her was rather anger than shame, burned on her face.

“To be faithful is no virtue; but only women

that are vile can be faithless. It is nothing what one is asked ; it is what one is, what one wills, that matters."

I remember how in the early days she had scorned Ariadnê, saying that Ariadnê should have died ere Dionysos scaled the rock.

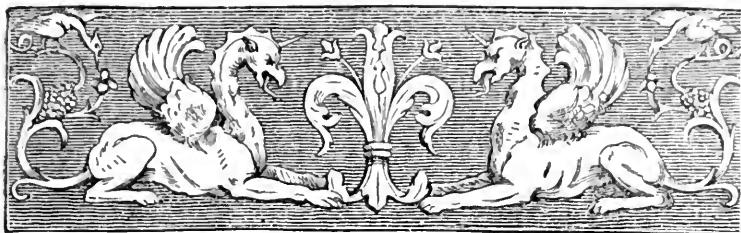
Fidelity in her was purification—nay, was innocence that needed no purification ; and not alone innocence, but supreme duty and joy that defied all cruelty of man to bruise it much, or utterly to destroy it.

She knew not enough of human nature and human ways and the evil thereof, to understand all that faithless women were ; but the instinct in her recoiled from them not less with scorn than horror. Faith to Hilarion was in her nature what faith in heaven was to the martyrs, whose bones lie here in the eternal night of subterranean Rome. It was a religion, an instinct, and a paradise—a paradise whence not even the silence and the abandonment of the god by whom she was forsaken could drive her out wholly into darkness.

For in a great love there is a self-sustaining

strength by which it lives, deprived of everything, as there are plants that live upon our barren ruins burned by the sun, and parched and shelterless, yet ever lifting green leaves to the light.





CHAPTER XI.

THE months went on, and seemed to me to creep as blind worms creep, and to do no more good than they to any living soul.

All these months she had shut herself in the studio of her tower, not stirring out, and only breathing the fresher air of night from one of her barred casements, when the sun was setting, or the stars had come out from the dark blue of Roman skies. For me, I stitched at my stall, and Palès, growing older, slept more, and grew more sharp of tooth and temper; and there were many changes amongst my neighbours, right and left, and many marriage groups went by, and many biers; but nothing touched me much, and all I cared to think of was of her, my Ariadnê.

One day—it might perhaps be six or seven

months after the day that I had led her through the Chiaramonti Gallery to Hermes—when I had gone to ask for her, as never a day passed but I did do, and Ersilia also, she opened the door of her lofty studio and came down a few of the stone stairs to my side.

“Come,” she said to me; and then I knew that she had found her strength and compassed some great labour.

The studio was a wide and lofty place, with walls and floor of stone, and narrow windows that opened in their centre on a hinge, and the plants that grew upon the roof hung down before their bars, and the pigeons flew in and out in the daytime.

“Look,” she said, and led me in and let me stand before the statue she had made, and which she had herself cut out from the block, and shaped in every line, till it stood there, a white and wondrous thing, erect in the sunlight shining from the skies, and seemed to live, nay, to leap forth to life as the Apollo does in Belvidere.

It was the same form that she had made in the clay at Venice and at Paris; that is, it was

Hilarion : the man made god, by the deifying power of the passion which thus beheld him. Every curve of the slender and symmetrical limbs was his, every line of the harmonious and Greek-like features his also ; but it was no longer a mortal, it was a divinity ; and about his feet played an ape and an asp, and in his hand he held a dead bird, and he looked at the bird in weariness and doubt.

That was all.

There was no other allegory. She knew that marble must speak in the simplest words, as poets spake of old, or not at all.

Marble must be for ever the Homer of the arts ; ceasing to be that, as it does cease if it be wreathed with ornament or tortured into metaphor, it ceases also to be art. Marble must speak to the people as it did of old over the blue Ægean sea and under the woods of Pelion, or be dumb—a mere tricked-out doll of fancy and of fashion.

She knew this, she who had been trained by Maryx ; and even had she forgotten his teachings, her own genius, cast on broad and noble lines, would have obeyed the axiom by instinct.

I stood silent and amazed before the statue ; amazed because the spiritualised and perfect beauty given in it to Hilarion seemed to me the most amazing pardon that a woman's forgiveness ever on this earth bestowed ; silent, because I, who had dwelt among sculptors all my years, could never have conceived it possible for her to give to any shape of stone such vitality, such proportion, such anatomical perfection, such personal sublimity as were all here.

It was a great work ; it would have been great in Athens, and was how much greater in this modern age ! And she was only a woman, and so young.

“ Oh, my dear ! oh, my dear ! ” I cried out to her, standing before it. “ Athene is with you still. You have the clue and the sword. Oh, my dear, with such gifts praise heaven ! What does the pain or the loss in life matter. You are great ! ”

She looked at me from under her lovely low brows and her half-falling hair, as the Ariadnê of the Capitol looks at you ; only with a look more intense—a look of deep pity, deeper scorn.

“Is that all that you know! Great! What use is that? I could not kill the ape and the asp. Perhaps he would not have left me if I had been foolish and like other women.”

I like an idiot cried out,—

“You blaspheme, and against yourself! The gods’ gifts are greater than his. You have the clue and the sword. How can you care? Let him perish, the ingrate and fool!”

The look in her eyes grew darker and deeper with sadness and scorn. She turned from me with almost aversion.

“I have only created it that he may see it, and that others may still see his face when I shall have been dead a thousand years; for it will be of him they will think, not of me.”

Then she was silent, and I could have spoken mad words against him, but I dared not; and I thought of the Daphne of Borghese with the laurel growing out of her breast, the laurel that always is bitter, and that hurts when it springs from the heart of a woman.

“Oh, my dear,” I said humbly to her, “be grateful; you have the gifts that a million of

mortals live and die without ever even comprehending. Be not thankless ; genius is consolation."

"For all but one thing," she said very low ; and her eyelids were wet.

And indeed after all there is nothing more cruel than the impotence of genius to hold and keep those commonest joys and mere natural affections which dullards and worse than dullards rejoice in at their pleasure ; the common human things, whose loss makes the great possessions of its imperial powers all valueless and vain as harps unstrung, or as lutes that are broken.

"It is very beautiful, and it is very great," I said to her, and said but barren truth.

"It is himself," she answered.

"What will you call it ?"

"Only—a poet."

"You will let it go out to the world, surely ?"

"Yes, that he may see it."

"You think he will come to you ?"

She shrank a little, as if one had stung her.

"No : he will not come back ; no. But perhaps he will remember a little, and drive the asps

and the apes away. If I could pray as the women pray in the churches, that is all I would ask ; nothing else—nothing else."

" My God ! How can you forgive like that ? "

" To love at all, is that not always to forgive ? "

Then a heavy sigh parted her beautiful lips that were now so pale yet still so proud, and she went away from my presence and left me alone with the marble. Had it not been her creation I think I should have struck the statue, and cursed it, and cast it down headlong ; as of old, they cast the false gods.

That day I went and sought Maryx. The fever had passed from him with the heats of summer, and the perilous rains of the autumn, and its agues and its fires had ceased to chill and burn him turn by turn. But he was weakened and aged, and never, so Giulio told me, touched the plane or the chisel ; his workmen he paid as of yore, but the workrooms were locked.

I asked to see him, and I told him.

" You bade me say how you could serve her," I said, to him. " You can serve her now. I am an old man and poor, and obscure, I can do nothing ;

will you let the great world see her work? Of no other man could I ask such a thing after—after,—but you are not like others."

His heart heaved, and the nerves of his cheek quivered, but he pressed my hand.

"I thank you that you know me well enough. What I can do I will. She was my pupil. I owe her such simple service as that."

"The work is great," I said to him. "I thought it might bring her fame, and fame consoles."

Maryx smiled; a weary smile.

"Does it? Those who have it not, think so; yes, I daresay."

"But if it do not console it may do something at the least; light some other passion, ambition, pride, desire of achievement, all an artist feels! If she can gather the laurel, let her. At the least, it will be better than love."

"She shall gather it," said he, who had been her master; and he came out with me into the night. It was a cold clear night, and the stars shone on the river.

"I have gathered it," he added. "Well, I

would change places with any beggar that crawls home to-night.”

I could not answer him.

We walked through the city in silence, he had lost his strength and his elasticity of movement, but he bore himself erect, and something of the vigour of energy had returned to him—since he could serve her.

Her tower was far from the Golden Hill ; he had never entered it ; but I had the keys of her working room, and I knew that at this hour she slept, or at least lay on her bed, shut in her chamber if sleepless. On the threshold of the studio I paused, frightened, for it seemed to me cruel to bring him there, and yet he was obliged to see the statue if he meant to help her to fame.

“Perhaps you had better not see it,” I muttered, “after all it is nothing, though beautiful ; nothing except—Hilarion.”

His face did not change, as I watched it with fear in the dull yellow lamplight.

“It could be nothing else, being her work. Open.”

My hands shook at the lock ; I felt afraid.

If I had longed to take a mallet and beat its beauty down into atoms and dust, what might not he do, he who had struck the Nausicaa as men strike a faithless wife ?

He took the key from me, and thrust it into the door.

“ What do you fear ? ” he said. “ Shall I harm the stone when I have let the man live ? ”

Then he opened the door and entered. I had left a lamp burning there ; a lamp that swung on a chain hung from above, and was immediately above the head of the statue. The stream of soft golden light from the burning olive oil fell full on the serene beauty of the figure, holding the dead nightingale in its hand, with doubt upon its features that was not regret.

A strong shudder shook Maryx.

I drew the door to, and waited without. It seemed to me that I waited hours, but no doubt they were only minutes. When the door unclosed, and he came forth from the chamber, he was calm and his face was only stern.

“ It is a great work ; it would be great for a great man. It will give her fame. It shall give it

to her. You look strangely ? What do you fear ? Am I so base as not to serve the genius I fostered ? My genius is dead : hers lives. That I can serve at least."

" You can reach such nobility as that ! "

" I see nothing noble. I am not quite base, that is all. Tell her—nay, I forgot ; she must not know that it is I who do anything—else you should tell her that her master thanks her."

And with that brave and tender word he left me and went out into the darkness.

It seemed to me that his forgiveness was greater even than hers : since even greater than hers was his loss.

Now when the springtime of that year came, the world of the arts spoke only of one great piece of sculpture, shown in the public halls, where Paris holds its rivalry of muses.

Before this statue of the poet all the great world paused in awe and ecstasy.

" Is it the work of Maryx ? " asked one half the world, and the other half answered :

" No ! It is greater than any work of Maryx."

And before the new youthful strength thus

arisen they slighted and spoke ill of the great strength that had been as a giant's in the past.

So had he his reward.





CHAPTER XII.

WHEN he had gone away that evening and I had returned to the studio to put out the lights, and see that all was safe, it being past midnight, I found her there, beside the work of her hands. A long, loose, white robe clung close to her, and fell about her feet ; she looked taller, whiter, lovelier, perhaps, than ever, but it seemed to me that there was in her beauty something unearthly ; one could have imagined her to be that Sospitra of her lover's poem, who was lifted above all earthly woes, save the two supreme sorrows—Love and Death.

She sat down on the wooden bench that stood near the statue and motioned me to stay.

“ You brought Maryx here ? ” she asked me.

“ Yes : I thought you were asleep.”

“ I seldom sleep—in my chamber I could hear your voices, but not what you said. Does it seem good to him—what I have done ? ”

“ It seems great.”

Then I told her all that he said to me ; and the noble soul of him seemed to me to shine through the words like the light through a lamp of alabaster ; and I saw that they touched her deeply. Her sad eyes gathered moisture in them, and her grand mouth, always so resolutely closed as though afraid that any reproach of her lost lover should escape them, trembled and grew soft.

“ He is too good to me,” she said at length. “ Oh, why was I born only to bring so much misery to others ! ”

“ Nay, there is some misery dearer to us than joy,” said I. “ Maryx loves you.”

A shudder ran through her and she stopped me.

“ Never speak of love to me. A woman faithful will not even think that any can feel love for her—save one ; it is almost infidelity.”

“ Nay, I spoke not of love so ; would I insult

you ? I mean simply and truly that his love for you is great enough to vanquish any remembrance of himself ; great enough too to make him hold his hand because you bid him : greater there cannot be."

She put out her hand to silence me.

" He received me into his house when I had no friend and no hope in the world, and he was so good to me. If he would but forget me ! I have been thankless. He taught me the strength and the secrets of the arts, and I have given him in return only pain and ingratitude."

" Dear, it is on pain that love lives longest."

Alas ! that she knew. She was silent some moments, whilst above her rose the beauty of her own creation.

Since she had returned to the pursuit and the occupation of art, the youth in her had revived ; the numbness and deadness which had seemed like a half paralysed intelligence had passed off her ; she had gathered up the clue and lifted up the sword, and though it was love that nerved her and not art, the effort had brought back inspiration, and inspiration to the artist is the very

breath of life ; without it his body may live but his soul does not.

She looked at her statue with wistful eyes.

“ You will send it to Paris.”

“ To Paris ? Before showing it here ? ”

“ Yes—he does not come here ; he would not see it.”

A deep flush came on the paleness of her face, as it always did at the very mention of Hilarion.

“ He will know that I have made it—he will believe in it,” she said a little later ; “ because he saw me make the Love in Venice.”

“ Where did that Love go ? ”

“ It was sent from Venice in a ship ; and the ship foundered, and went down, in a storm.”

“ And the statue was lost ? ”

“ Yes.”

She leaned her head upon her hands, so that I could not see her face ; she had never before spoken to me of that time. I stood silent, thinking how terrible an augury had been that foundered Love, sunk to the bottom of the deep sea, companioned only with the dead.

Almost I longed to tell her of all that he had said by the temple of Agrippa, but I dared not ; she believed that he had loved her once ; I had not courage to say to her—even his first caresses were a lie !

To her Hilarion remained a creature who could do no wrong : I had not heart to say to her—there was no sort of truth in him ever, not even when he swore to you eternal faith.

“And if he do read the message of your marble,” I asked her, abruptly ; “if he do read it, if he be touched by it—if he come back to you, what then ? Will you let him come—now ?”

Her face was leaning on her hands, but I could see the blush that covered her throat and rose to her temples.

“It would be different now,” she muttered. “Then I did not know—no, I did not know. I obeyed him. I had no idea that I became worthless in his sight. When you spoke to me so bitterly in Venice, you pained me, but I did not understand ; I never did until those friends

of his in Paris (he called them friends) wrote to me and sent me their jewels when he was away. It is not that I care what the whole world thinks me, but to be lowered in his sight, to seem to him only a frail foolish thing like the rest——”

A great heavy sob heaved her heart; she lifted her face to mine, it was burning now, with an indignant pain in her uplifted eyes.

“Look! What does it mean?—who is to tell the ways of the world? That vile woman whom he lived with here in Rome, she is faithless and cruel and false, and betrayed him as well as her husband, and yet he goes back to her and the world sees no shame in her, though she wears his jewels about her neck, and dishonours her children. And I, who sleeping and waking, never think, but of him; who have never a thought he might not know; who am his alone, his always, in life and in eternity, if eternity there be, I am shameful, you say, and he has ceased to love me because I loved him too well:—who can understand? I cannot.”

I knew not what to say to her: the laws and

the ways of the world are sadly full of injustice and cast in stiff lines that fit in but ill with the changeful and wayward needs of human life: I knew not what to say.

She lapsed into silence; it was natural to her to endure; it was very seldom that any reproach escaped her either of fate or of him. Her brain perplexed itself wearily over the problem of where her fault had lain by which she had lost him; she was too loyal to see that the fault was in himself.

“ Shall it go then to Paris ? ” I said, to lead her thoughts back to her labours.

She gave a sign of assent.

“ May it be sold ? ”

“ Ah no—never ! ”

“ It is to come back to you, then ? ”

“ Unless he wish for it.”

“ Would you give it him ? ”

“ I have given him my life ! ”

“ Shall I put your name on it, or will you carve it there ? ”

“ No. Let it go as the work of a pupil of Maryx. That is true.”

“ Maryx thinks it will give you a fame not second to his own.”

“ Fame ? I do not care for fame.”

She looked up at the marble once more.

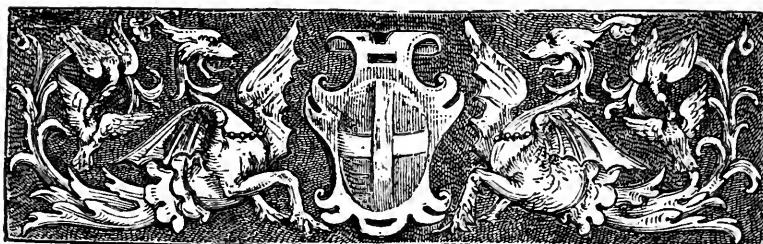
“ Once I used to think I should like all the ages that are to come to echo my name, but that is nothing to me now. If only it may speak to him :—that is all I want. Perhaps you do not believe, because he has left me ; but indeed when I was with him he heard only the nightingales, and the apes and the asps never came near. Do you remember when we walked by Nero’s fields that night of Carnival, you said he was like Pheineus. But the evil spirits never had any power on him when I was there : he told me so, so often. If only by that marble I can speak to him ! If one could only put one’s soul and one’s life into the thing one creates, and die in one’s body, so as to be alive in art alone, and close to what one loves !—there are legends :—”

She wound her arms close about the white limbs of her statue, and laid her lips to them as she had done to the Hermes, and leant on the cold sculpture her beating breaking heart.

“Take my life away with you,” she cried to it,
“take it to him—take it to him !”

Then she broke down and wept, and sobbed bitterly, as women do.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE statue went to Paris, and the word and the weight of Maryx went with it, as I have said, and did for it what influence can do in a day, and genius unaided may beg for in vain through a score of years.

It was accepted by the judges of the Salon, and placed between a group of Louis Rochet's and a figure, by Paul Dubois. Maryx had had carved upon it the letters of her name : Giojà : no more. It was made known to those whom it concerned that she was a woman, and very young, and his pupil in Rome.

The statue had been unveiled but a few days when the city spoke of it and spoke of little else, wherever art was comprehended and

talked of ; it took a tired public by surprise, and its triumph was instantaneous and widespread.

There was something in it that was unlike all the world had ever seen ; the very mystery that to many enveloped its meaning only added to its charm for the curiosity of mankind. Within a few weeks her name was a household word in the world of art : that short and happy-sounding name that was in such sad unlikeness to her destiny. She had been the original of the Nausicaa, some sculptor told them so ; and then they flocked to where the Nausicaa could be seen, and talked the more of her, and some few began to say—"that is the same face as the Roman girl had who was with Hilarion."

For though the world has a shallow memory for excellence, it is always tenacious of remembrances that are hurtful, and of recollections that can tarnish renown.

One day Hilarion arrived in Paris, having been absent for a month or so : he loved all the arts, nor ever missed the fresh fruits of them ; he went early to the *Salon* one bright morning

with some associates, who were famous men in their own way, and artists. One of them, midway in the central chamber, touched him and pointed to the Roman marble.

“Look! That is the marvel of all Paris. A perfect creation, and they say the sculptor is only a woman.”

Hilarion listlessly lifted his eyes to the figure: then his face lost all colour, and he approached it quickly.

“Now I see you, beside it—it is like you,” said one of his friends. “Perhaps you have known her in Rome? She is a Roman, and was a pupil of Maryx, they say.”

Hilarion was silent. He was very pale. He understood the parable in the stone.

His friends spoke learnedly around him, praising the work with the discriminative homage of great critics. On the base of the statue her name was cut after the habit of sculptors; he read it, and it hurt him curiously.

He stood before the figure, that was but himself made god, and heeded nothing of the jests of his friends. As the sun shone all about the fair

pale Carrara marble, and illumined the name cut on the stone, he felt a pang that had never before touched his cold, voluptuous self-control and fortunate life.

“Who else could love me like that!” he thought to himself; and thought also,—what beasts we are, that it is not love that touches us, but the pursuit of it that we desire.

He understood that to him alone was consecrated her creation. She had striven to excel only that by excelling she might reach some place in his remembrance. The bird was dead: he repented that he had killed it.

A little later, a woman who could say to him what men could not venture to say, spoke to him of it.

“This poet is you,” she said. “Who loves you like that? Was the poor bird that lies dead a mere woman, like Aedôn and Philomel?”

He answered, “Yes, but a woman without sin; the sin was mine.”

And his conscience stirred in him and his heart went out to her, and he remembered her as he had seen her when he had kissed her first, and

trembling she had cried to him, “It will be all my life!”

It was all her life : it had been only a summer or two of his.

The statue he would have bought if any extravagance—if half his fortune—could have purchased it ; but he heard that it was in no way to be had.

In early morning; long before the men and women of his own world were astir, he rose often and went into the lonely place where the figure stood, and looked at it.

“No one else could love me like that,” he thought over and over again to himself.

She had accepted her fate at his hands without reproach and without appeal ; but this message sent to him in the marble, this parable in stone, moved him as no words and as no woe would have done. The faint hope with which she had sent it forth was fulfilled. He remembered—almost he repented.

He read the parable of the marble, but he stayed on with the apes and the asps, and the one mocked and beguiled him, and the others

bit his tired senses into a poisonous irritation which he fancied was passion. But still when he was in solitude he remembered, he regretted, almost he repented.

Meanwhile about him the great world talked of her wherever the arts were understood by men, and saluted her as a great artist. The laurel was set like a sharp spear in her breast, and was watered with her heart's blood, as with Daphne's.

Hearing that, he strove to silence his conscience, saying to himself, "Her genius is with her; it will console her in time. I have not harmed her,—so much."

One night, on an impulse, he wrote to her, and sent it through me. They were but seven words :

"I am unworthy, but I thank you."

I gave them to her. She wept over them and blessed them as other women weep over and bless the face of their firstborn. She was thankful as other women are before some great gift of homage and of honour rendered to them in the sight of nations.

To me the words seemed but poor and cold.

I could not tell then how he felt when he wrote them. I heard from him long afterwards, when all was of no use.

They did contain, indeed, perhaps the truest utterance that he had ever made. He felt his own unworthiness, he who had been wrapped all his days in the toga of a superb and indifferent and contemptuous vanity, and the sense of it wounded and galled him; yet he thanked her because he had a heart in his breast, and because, as he said, men are not vile, they are only children—children spoilt often by the world's indulgence or by the world's injustice.

He would go, I say, in the early morning, when none of his own world were about, and stand before the statue and think of her till a great shame entered into him and a great regret.

An angel comes once in their lives to most men: seldom do they know their visitant; often do they thrust the door against it. Any way, it never comes but once. He recognised the angel now; nay, he had known it when first he had opened his arms to it; but it had brought too

pure a breath of heaven with it: he had put it away and gone back to the apes and the asps; and the marble looked at him, and its parable smote him into remembrance and regret.

But he did not return; for he had not loved her.

Besides he did not dare to take to this creature who still loved him and who dwelt under the shield of Athene, merely more shame again. He did not dare to look in those clear eyes which saw the faces of the immortals, and say, “I never loved you; I only ruined your life out of a vain caprice.”

She, wearing out her years in silence and solitude for his sake in that loneliness which is more bitter and sorrowful than any widowhood, would not have touched him; but she, with the clue and the sword in her hands and the laurel in her breast, regained a place in his remembrance, and haunted him.

The dead he would have forgotten; but this living woman, of whom the world spoke, whom it crowned, who had the supreme powers of art, and threw them down at his feet and dedicated

them to him alone, this living woman he could not forget, and he said again and again to himself, “Who else could love me like that?”

There are men whom the entire consciousness of the perfect possession of a woman’s life makes indifferent: there is no need to guard what will not stray: such men need the spur of uncertainty, the stimulant of rivalry; this is why innocent women fail and vile women succeed. Hilarion was one of these men; the absolute consecration of her, body and soul, to himself did not cement but only loosened the bonds that bound him.

“She will always be there,” he had said to himself. So he had left her and had strayed to those of whom he was not so sure.

The faint unformed jealousy which now rose in him of Maryx drew his thoughts back to her as no sense of her living and dying for his sake could ever have done. He could not tell that Maryx never even saw her face. He could not know that she had refused to see her master, and that Maryx of his own will shrank from any approach to her.

He heard that Maryx had placed her talent

before the world, and heard all men speak the name of her teacher in company with hers ; a vague irritation, which was not worthy of a better name, stirred in him ; he knew they were both in Rome.

It was his perception of the love of Maryx for her which had first made him subjugate her to his own passion. The affinity of Maryx to her in this, their common, art stirred in him a restless annoyance which only was not jealousy, because he knew her too well and because he loved her too little.

He knew that she to himself would be for ever faithful ; but though he knew this, he did not like to think that any other lived who could render her that loyalty, that tenderness, that service in which his own passion had been lacking. He knew well that she would live and die alone ; but he did not care to think that a greater than himself could call to her consolation in her solitude the gifts and the arms of Athene.

He knew himself to be very base in this ; but when the world speaking of her said, “she was the pupil of Maryx,” he felt a contemptuous

impatience ; when they said “she was a mistress of Hilarion,” he was content. He knew that this was very base, so base that seeing it in any other man he would have called it the dishonour of a knave. Yet so it was.

And still there were times when standing before the marble in the pure morning light, he thought with many a pang of that young life which had been as pure as the light of day ere he had clouded it ; and his conscience smote him sorely, because by his act, and by his will, for ever there would lie across the lustre of her fame the heavy shadow of the world’s reproach.

“ You grow dull,” said the apes and the asps to him ; and he made them no answer : he had always forgotten all things so easily, and now,—for once,—he could not forget.

Meanwhile Maryx was also in Paris.

He had not yielded to any other the care of her labour, nor let any chance escape him of being first to do her service. When he heard and read, as he did, that her work was declared greater than his own (for the world is very mutable and false to its own idols) he was glad

—for her sake. He knew that it was not so, but the strong alone can be generous.

He was thankful that by any means of his, Art could console her; the divine Dionysos, who came to her in her loneliness on Naxos, amidst the salt sea, and who might perchance make the barren rock bloom with flowers for her once more.

When the fame of the statue was certain, and all Paris, and thus all the world, spoke of it, he returned to us.

“ Will she see me—now ? ” he asked me.

I answered him—yes.

The day had been chill ; it was evening time ; lamps that swung from cords shed a faint light in her studio as he entered ; she rose and went to him. I saw him shiver and move a step backward involuntarily : then he controlled himself.

“ I have done what I could,” he said ; and then his voice was choked in his throat.

She looked up into his eyes.

“ You will not hurt him ? ”

“ No.”

Then she took his hands in hers.

“ You are my master and my friend : I thank you.”

He shivered again at her touch ; but the brave soul in him kept silence.

“ Dear :—you are my pupil no more,” he said, with a smile,—ah ! the courage of that smile !

“ You are greater than I ; the world says so.”

“ The world is foolish,” she answered. “ If I be great in any way, it is by you alone.”

“ Nay—by Athene !” he said, and strove to smile again.

He left her very soon.

To remain near her was beyond his strength. We went together down the dusky stairs and out into the night.

We went on in silence through the city towards the river’s banks.

“ She looks ill,” he said abruptly, once.

“ Oh no—oh no,” I said, with feverish denial. “ She seldom sleeps, I think ; and now that the marble is gone—her life seems gone away with it. That is all—that is all !”

“ All !” he echoed : and walked on in silence.

We came upon the moonlit quietness of Tiber.

“ Do they indeed call her so great in Paris ? ” I cried, as I looked up at my own window where she had used to stand amongst the bean flowers to watch the river on just such a night as this one was.

“ Yes. They have crowned her there ; and they say,—‘ a great genius ? — yes, — she was one of the loves of Hilarion.’ That is what they say, almost always.”

“ And yet we let him live.”

“ She wishes it. Have we a right to make her more desolate ? ”

I did not answer him. I was sick of heart. The beautiful Immortal who had come to her in her loneliness, was that offspring of Jove we call Art : must the bow of slander be bent, and the arrow of scorn be sped to slay her, as the shaft of Artemis slew Ariadnê ?

Mine had been only a dream—only a dream ; must she always suffer for that ?

Maryx had paused, and was standing on the brink of the water, looking down into its limpid darkness. The moonlight fell on the white locks that had come about his forehead, and the lines

of age that these few years had scored upon his cheeks. He was lost in thought.

“There is one hope for her,” he said to himself; then said aloud to me :

“With the morning I shall return to Paris.”

Then he went across the Tiber to his home upon the hill of Janus.

He went into one room and locked himself in : it was the room where she had laboured, and where there stood the Apollo Cithœradus.

Who can tell how he prayed there and wrestled in prayer, and to what gods ?

Be his god what it would, he came out thence with every nerve in him strung to a sacrifice as great as ever sent men here in Rome to martyrdom. With the grey dawn, whilst the city he loved was still wrapped in her mantle of mist, he left the lovely house that he had built for himself under the cypresses and amongst the myrtles, and passed out of Rome.



CHAPTER XIV.

It was the night of the second day when he reached Paris. He went straight to the house of Hilarion.

It was seven in the evening. He was well-known there, and entered without question or hindrance.

They had been friends for a score of years.

The household showed him without hesitation into the presence of their master, who was alone, in his own chamber, with all the graceful litter collected by a luxurious and curious taste strewn round him, and the smell of flowers, for which he had a feminine fondness, was upon the air, and their blossoms were glowing against the old armour and the old sculptures, and the dark, book-lined walls of the place.

Hilarion drew a deeper breath as he saw who had entered, but he had a graceful and gracious greeting always for friend and foe.

“It is years since we met, my friend,” he said ; “I am glad—”

Then he paused ; for even to him it was not easy to be false of tongue to Maryx ; nor did he mistake the glance that flashed for one instant from the passionate eyes that met his.

“We can be friends no more,” said Maryx, yet he approached and stood by the hearth.

“Crispino went to take your life in Venice,” he said slowly, standing there ; “the Greek boy watched for you night and day here ; I swore to kill you—and you live still, because she bids us let you live.”

Hilarion was silent : he felt no resentment : brave himself, he had no anger against those who would have killed him ; he thought them right.

“You make me think of the *Devotio* of the Romans,” he said, with a passing smile. “Threatened men live long, they say.”

Maryx kept down unuttered whatever passion he felt ; he had nerved himself to a great un-

selfish effort—a last supreme sacrifice,—and was too strong to be easily shaken from his purpose.

“ Listen to me,” he said, calmly still. “ We are wrong and she is right. To kill you would do her no service, and you perhaps no injury: what do we know! I have not come to avenge her; she told me the truth; I have no title to do it. Had she wished it, I would not have stayed my hand for that, but since she chooses to forgive you—it is not for us to make her more desolate than she is.”

Hilarion interrupted him.

“ Have you no title?” he said, with his coldest smile. “ Surely you have one. I think you loved her yourself.”

“ I did: I do.”

He added nothing more, and there was silence between them.

Maryx breathed heavily, and his teeth were set hard: he looked away from Hilarion, all the while he had never once looked at him; he was afraid to look at him, lest the great hate that filled his soul should vanquish the resolve on which he had come there.

“I loved her: yes,” he resumed; “I should have given her peace, honour, my name, such as it is, all that one can give:—that is why I have some right to speak to you. Bear with me. I would have killed you as her father, were he living, would have done; let me speak to you as her father could not do. I am no moralist. I will read you no homily. I want but to tell you the truth as I know it. She loves you with so great a love that I think the earth never held one like it. Honest men, and lovers that are faithful, break their hearts in vain for such passion as that; and you!—nay, bear with me. You must know very well that what you did was the act of a coward—since she was defenceless, and had no god but you.”

Hilarion’s serene eyes lit with sudden fire, but he looked down, and he remained mute.

“There is no one to tell you all that she has suffered, nor how absolutely she forgives,” said Maryx. “That is why I have come to tell you. It is just to her that you should know.”

Then he told to Hilarion all that he knew himself: from the time that she had lost her

reason, when the clay image had crumbled down under the blows of Amphion, to the moment, three nights before, when she had said to him himself, ere she would touch his hand, “You will not hurt him ?”

It would have cost him less to have cut his heart out of his bosom than it cost him to tell the story of that changeless passion ; but he told it without flinching, abating no tittle of its truth.

Hilarion heard him in unbroken silence, leaning against the oaken shelf of his hearth, with his head bent down and his eyelids drooped.

His face grew paler when he heard of her physical sufferings and needs, since it was these that he was touched by most keenly. With all the wide and varied comprehension of his intelligence, there was a certain shallowness of feeling in him which made the deepest woes of the human heart seldom intelligible to him.

“ Why did the old man tell me nothing of this ? ” he muttered, when he had heard to the end.

“ He would not tell you lest you should go to her ; I tell you that you may go.”

Hilarion was silent still He could ill measure

the generosity of the man who loved her vainly ; but it smote him and made him feel humbled and ashamed.

“No woman, I think, ever loved you as this woman does, whom you have left as I would not leave a dog,” said Maryx, and something of his old ardent eloquence returned to him, and his voice rose and rang clearer as the courage in him consummated the self-sacrifice that he had set himself for her sake. “Have you ever thought what you have done? When you have killed Art in an artist, you have done the cruellest murder that earth can behold. Other and weaker natures than hers might forget, but she never. Her fame will be short-lived as that rose, for she sees but your face, and the world will tire of that, but she will not. She can dream no more. She can only remember. Do you know what that is to the artist?—it is to be blind and to weary the world ; the world that has no more pity than you have ! You think her consoled because her genius has not left her : are you a poet and yet do not know that genius is only a power to suffer more and to remember longer?—nothing else. You say to your-

self that she will have fame, that will beguile her as the god came to Ariadnê : perhaps : but across that fame, let it become what it may, there will settle for ever the shadow of the world's dis-honour ; it will be for ever poisoned, and cursed, and embittered by the scorn of fools, and the reproach of women, since by you they have been given their lashes of nettles, and by you have been given their bye-word to hoot. She will walk in the light of triumph, you say, and therefore you have not hurt her : do you not see that the fiercer that light may beat on her, the sharper will the eyes of the world search out the brand with which you have burned her. For when do men forgive force in the woman ? and when do women ever forgive the woman's greatness ? and when does every cur fail to snarl at the life that is higher than its fellows ? It is by the very genius in her that you have had such power to wound, such power to blight and to destroy. By so long as her name shall be spoken, so long will the wrong you have done her cling round it, to make it meet for reproach. A mere woman dies, and her woe and her shame die with her, and the earth covers her and

them ; but such shelter is denied for ever to the woman who has genius and fame ; long after she is dead she will lie out on common soil, naked and unhouselled, for all the winds to blow on her and all the carrion birds to tear.”

His voice broke down for a moment, and he paused and breathed heavily and with pain. A faint dusky red of anger, yet more of shame, came on the face of Hilarion.

What was noble in him was touched and aroused ; what was vain and unworthy was wounded and stung.

“ I do not follow you,” he muttered. “ What would you have me do ? ”

“ What ? surely you know that when Paris salutes in her a great artist, it tells also the tale of her ruin by you ? ”

Hilarion moved restlessly.

“ I know ! She was seen here one winter ; is it my fault ? If the statue had been unlike me, Paris would not have remembered.”

“ That is all you say ? ”

“ It is all there is to say ; if she would forget, the world would forget too.”

“ Oh my God ! ”

Maryx groaned aloud. It seemed to him as terrible as when of old some lovely human life, in its first youth, was laid low in sacrifice to some god of stone, whose eyes of stone could not even behold in pity its death throes.

“ But she will not forget. Have I told you so in vain ? ” he cried aloud, and his voice rose and rolled like thunder through the silence. “ She will never forget,—God help her ! Vile women and light ones forget ; and the adulteress forgets, and the harlot ; but she—can you look at that marble and insult her, still ? To her you are lover and lord, and husband and king, and the only god that she knows, and the one shame of her life and its one glory. Have you no pity ? have you no human heart in your breast ? were you not born of a woman ? You found her content and innocent, and in peace, and for your own pleasure and vanity drove all that away, and all her dreams and all her girl-hood perished by you—and you only say she should forget ! Can even men forget when they will ? ”

“I can,” Hilarion answered ;—and he lied.

“Is it your boast?” said Maryx, and the fierce pangs in him rose to fury, and he barely held his hand from the throat of the man who stood there.

“Well then, forget if you will, and may God forget you in recompense! Listen one moment more, and I have done. To-day I come from the presence of men who are great, and who say that never has a woman been so near greatness as she is. You know her—you, as no other can—know her pure and perfect, and without soil save such as you, in your sport, have chosen to cast on her. You know her truth and innocence so entirely that you have confessed how they shamed you and wearied you by their very excellence. She is lovely as the morning ; she is yours in life and in death. What more can you want? Will you not go back to her? Will you not give honour where you have given dishonour? Will you not, when you are dying, be glad to feel one wrong the less was done? You have said she is to forget. She will only forget in her grave. Have you no pity? What

can I say to move you ? If you have no tenderness for such love as hers you are colder than the marble in which she has made your likeness, and lifted it up as a god to the world ! ”

The strength of his own emotion choked his words ; he pleaded for her as never would he for his own life’s sake have pleaded for himself.

Hilarion listened in silence ; his eyelids were still drooped ; his face was still tinged with the faint red of what was half shame, half anger.

He was shaken to the depths of his nature, but those depths were not deep as in the nature of the man who besought him, and they had long been filled up with the slough of vanity, and of self-indulgence.

His heart thrilled, his pulse quickened, his eyes were dim, he was full of pain, even full of repentance ; he thought of the young head that had lain on his breast in such faith, as the dove on its safest shelter ; he felt the clinging caress of those hands which were so weak in his own, though so strong to wield the sword of Athene.

All that had ever been in him of manhood, of tenderness, of valour, yearned in one tender

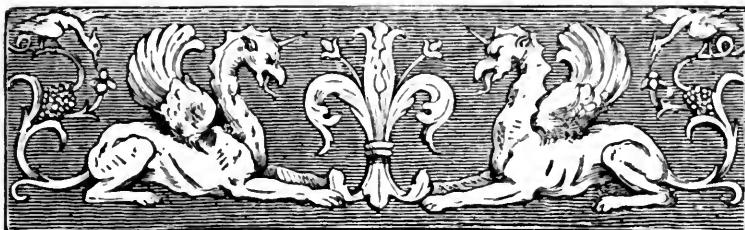
longing to yield to the impulse within him ; but all that was vain, selfish, and cold stirred under censure and nerved him against emotion. The imperious irritation of his temper rose, and his vanity was wounded by the very shame he felt. His pride refused ; his impatience of counsel chafed ; and that cruel mockery which often mastered him as if it were a devil that lived in him, and were stronger than he, spurred him now to what he knew was an infamy.

He lifted his eyes slowly with a contemptuous regard, and smiled.

“ You waste much eloquence,” he said. “ You have loved her ; you love still. Console her yourself.”

Maryx struck him on the mouth.





CHAPTER XV.

To a blow there is but one answer; in our land at least.

The dawn was scarcely broken when they met again. The air was grey and windless, and cold. They did not speak a word.

Hilarion's first shot struck Maryx in the breast. Maryx had fired in the air.

He stood a moment erect, with his face to the sunrise, then fell to the ground, backward, his head striking the turf and the stones. They heard him say as he fell :

“ She bade me not hurt him—I promised.”

Then he lay quite still, and the blood began to well out slowly from his mouth.

The delicate and nervous hand that had hewn such lovely and majestic shapes out from the rocks,

clenched the roots of the rank grasses in the convulsion of a mortal agony : in another moment it relaxed its hold and was motionless, palm upward, on the earth : never more to create, never more to obey the will of the soul and the brain.

The sun came over the low hills suddenly, and it was day. He gave one long slow shuddering sigh as his life blood choked him ; then stretched his limbs out wearily, and lay there dead.





CHAPTER XVI.

AND the old mother was sitting at home blind, and telling her wooden beads, and saying in her prayers :

“ Dear Mother of God, let him soon come back, for when I hear his voice I seem to see a little still ; it is not all quite dark.”

I sat by my stall by the bridge, and it was brilliant noon tide, and the waters were glancing like satin in the sun, when the story of his death came to me. Giulio brought it to me, rushing like a mad creature down from the Golden Hill, his white hair blowing from his bare head, and his eyes seeming to leap from their sockets.

“ The master ! the master ! ” he cried, and for a long time could say no more, staring at the skies and gasping the name of Maryx.

When I arose and understood it seemed to me as if the Tiber ran blood, and as if all Rome rocked with the throes of an earthquake.

Maryx dead !

It seemed to me as if the very earth must groan aloud, and the very dogs of the streets weep.

Why had I broken the steel in Venice ?—I cursed my imbecility and my feebleness of purpose, I cursed the mother that had borne me, a fool only fit to bring ruin on all lives that I honoured and loved !

“ It is I who have murdered him—I ! ” I cried loud to the terrified crowds.

Fortune had blessed him for five and twenty years, and I had bade him pause that day by the Wingless Love !

I remember how bright the noon was, how the fresh winds from the sea rushed by, how the little birds were singing, and how the swallows and the pigeons were whirling and darting above the waters ; and he was lying dead, he whose thoughts and whose labours had been strong as Hercules, and as Adonis beautiful !

He was dead—dead—dead—the great soul of

him gone out into nothingness as the flame of the lamp he had struck down had been quenched in the darkness.

An awful silence seemed to fall on Rome.

There were so many wept for him.

And none could be found who dared tell his mother for me—they say that I was mad, as I had been that day when I had seen the white sail fade out of sight on the sea.

I had murdered him—that was all that seemed written to me, everywhere, on the sky as on a scroll, and on the streets as on tablets of stone. As the throngs of students and of poor rushed by me over the bridge, going to his beautiful home, where the sculptures were and the nightingales, to know if indeed this thing were true, I stood in their way and cried to them :

“ Throw me in the river, it is I who killed him. I was the first to bid him look on her face ! ”

And they did not understand me and pushed me aside, and I fell, and some of them trampled on me as they rushed onward. When I rose, bruised and crushed, a sudden memory struck across my heaving brain.

The one for whom he had died she must not know! oh, she must never know! I said to myself; yet how keep from her what all Rome mourned, how deafen her ear to the woe that was a whole city's?

I staggered up to the house on the Golden Hill, why, I know not, only as all Rome was flocking there; there was a great multitude before the gates, and there were throngs of his own friends in the green garden ways.

The old blind woman within heard the noise of the many feet, and nodded her head.

“That is all the princes come for him, I dare-say: he lives with the kings, you know,” and then, for she grew childish, she sent her maids about: “Go, tell them he is not home, but he will be home to-night; yes, to-night. I bade him not be long.”

And no one could be found who would tell her the truth. When at last a priest told her, she would not believe. She shook her head.

“Dead before *me*? Nay, nay, God is good.”

When the priest sadly insisted, she would not hear.

“Look you,” she said to him: “the marble killed them all, and the marble took the soul out of him, but God would not take his body too. No, because I should be all alone; God is too good for that.”

And she told her beads, and they could not make her believe, since she was sure that God was good.

I crept back to my stall, shivering in the full summer heat.

By evening I sent the Greek lad, who only lived to do her any service if he could, to say to the people of Giojá that I was unwell and would be with her on the morrow, bidding him caution those about her to keep the truth from her ear. I had no fear that she would come out into the streets. She seldom went abroad, for when she needed air there was the great garden of her own dwelling, and she never now left its gates.

The night and the day and another night passed. I sent the lad with messages to her to say that I was still sick, and should scarce be able to traverse the city for a few days: I felt as if I

could never look upon her face and think of him, and hold my silence—and surely to know the truth would kill her. I could not tell what to do.

It seemed to me as if the earth could never hold so much woe and still go on, through the air, round the sun, and bring the seasons one by one, and the birth of the children.

On the third day they brought his dead body home to Rome. Great artists came with it. They laid the bier down in the north room : they laid it beneath the Apollo Cithæradus.

“A great man is dead,” they said, “and there are none living that are like to him.”

It was serene midsummer weather.

Outside, under the arbutus and laurel, his nightingales were still flooding the evening air with their music ; his roses were blooming, his doves were sleeping under the leaves, his aloes were unsheathing fresh blades in the light ; the sunrays and the moonrays wandered by turn across the marble floor, all night long the birds sang—the birds he had loved to hear,—and he lay dead there in his leaden shroud : under the Apollo of the Lute.

The people came there and stood there in large quiet crowds, at times weeping and wailing, for all Rome had honoured him.

His charities had been liberal as the fragrance of the summer, and the young and the old mourned one with another, saying, ‘to be in need was to be his friend:’ but neither the lamentation of the people nor the song of the nightingales could reach the ear that was deaf for the first time to their sorrow and to their song.

He was dead: and Hilarion had killed him.

I said it over and over to myself, again and again and again, kneeling on the threshold of the room by the side of Giulio: and still it seemed to me impossible; still it seemed to me that, if indeed it were so, the earth must stand still, and the sun cease to rise.

The lights burned around the bier; the shutters were closed; the nightingales sang without, we could hear them;—in her own chamber his mother sat and told her beads and said—“Dead? Nay, never! God is too good for that.”

I did not know how time went. I seemed to

have knelt there for ever and ever ; the candles were like clusters of stars ; the faint singing of the birds was like a child's dream of angels ; the Apollo leaned above on his mute lyre ; and in the midst was Maryx dead.

I suppose two or three nights had passed, and still he lay there for the sight of the Roman people, and the multitudes came and went, softly, and weeping, until out of all the great city there were few left who had not bent their knee there where he lay, and gone down, away under the stars, through the cypresses, saying, that earth had not his like.

Once I heard the voice of a woman, saying : “There is one whom I pity more than he : it is the man who slew him.”

Were there women who pitied Hilarion ?

Doubtless some women pitied Cain.

In the gloom, whilst the lights were burning still, some one raised me at last, and thrust me out from the doorway, and there were torches like a great fire, flaring and flaming under the warm summer skies, and making the moonlight red ; and there were voices chanting, and black robes

and white, and the nightingales were frightened and dumb: then I knew that the end was come.

I stumbled out by the side of Giulio, and together we went down the green garden paths, under the boughs, over the fallen orange flowers that were like snow upon the ground: for the last time we followed him.

His fellow sculptors bore his pall, and the youths of the Villa Medici were his first mourners. Behind them were the crowds of Rome, the illustrious and the beggar side by side.

Thus was his body borne down the Golden Hill for evermore, over the bridge, across the water, in the hush of the night, and out of the city gates, beyond the walls, to the burial-ground by San Lorenzo.

I had so little sense left in me, so little consciousness, save that I was alive, and stumbled on in the midst of the multitudes, with the thousands of flaming torches, and the ten thousand stars of light that even the poorest hand had found means to carry there, amidst the

dull slow sound of the rolling wheels of the princes and the tramp of the feet of the poor, and the sighing moan of the chants as they rose and fell, that I never remembered that the funeral must pass on its road by the tower which stood near to the Gateway of Honorius.

When I remembered, the torches were already burning on the wind under the very walls : I screamed aloud, but who should have heard, or hearing would have heeded ?

I looked up : her casements were all open : she was awake in the lovely summer night that was near on its twelfth hour.

The people rolled on like the heavy waves of a sea, and the flare, as of fire, illumined the silent solitary way : I was borne on with the throngs onward and onward to the field of tombs.

There the earth yawned and the grave took him.

I know not how long a time had gone when the multitudes passed backward to the city, leaving him there alone.

The torches were burning low ; old men were weeping like little children, the children in their

fathers' arms were silent and afraid ; the sorrow of all Rome was his requiem.

As the crowds bore me with them through the gates, in the starlit midnight, the people nearest me gave way ; a shadowy white figure came through the press, and I saw the face of Giojà—there—unveiled, in the dull red glow of the torchlight.

“ Who is it—dead ? ” she asked, and her voice seemed to me to come from afar off as if from the heights of the air or the depths of the graves.

Before I could answer her, Giulio spoke : willing to slay her if the words would slay.

“ Maryx is dead. Whom else should all Rome mourn ? Your lover killed him—for your sake.”





CHAPTER XVII.

THE summer went on ; the nightingales of Maryx sang on under the rose thickets, and the glossy leaves of the laurels ; the rank grass grew on his grave, and it was marked by one vast rough block of white marble, as though to say, that no hand after his dared carve the rocks ; his mother, blind and in dotage, sat and told her wooden beads, and smiled and said always : “Dead ! Nay, nay ; God were too good for that.”

Rome was empty and silent as the grave, and only the hot winds were left to wander, unquiet, through the deserted streets.

And she—my Ariadnê,—was dying slowly as the summer died.

“ You have killed her ! ” I had said to Giulio that night.

“ So best,” he had answered me ; for his soul was set against her as a thing accursed ; he, who had seen the blows of the mallet shatter the copy of the *Nausicaa*.

The wise men whom I brought to her, said there was no disease ; there may have been none ; but none the less I knew that her life was over, and the Greek lad knew it too, because he loved her. From that night when she had seen the funeral of *Maryx* pass beneath her walls, and learned by whom he had been slain, she seemed to droop just as a flower will ; there is no decay that you can see ; the blossom is lovely, and its leaves young, and the dews of morning are on it, but, nevertheless, it fades—fades—fades, and you know that in a little while you will rise some day and find it dead.

Who can measure what she felt ?

Aïdön never had more innocence and more remorse—*Aïdön* who slew what she cherished in the dark, not knowing.

By her had death come to the one and crime to the other : had she been in the old days of Rome, she would have plunged her living body into the

yawning earth, or the leaping fires, to purify the souls of those whom she had cursed.

“Let me go to him!” she cried once; for it was still the living man of whom she thought the most, and perchance the woman in the crowd had been right; perhaps it was he who needed pity the most.

Then her head fell on her breast.

“I cannot,” she muttered. “He will hate me for ever,—now.”

She dared not go to him; she through whom, all innocently, his hands were red with the blood of his friend.

She was to herself accursed, and the death and the sin that had come by her lay on her innocent soul like lead, and under the ghastly weight of it the youth in her withered as the grass withers up under a heavy stone.

Day by day, slowly, the strength in her waned, and the loveliness of her faded.

To her none of the common excuses for his act would have been intelligible. She understood none of the customs and conventions that rule the world he dwelt in; she could not have compreh-

hended why in the eyes of men he had done no wrong, but merely followed out his right in vengeance of a blow. She knew nothing of all this : she only understood that he had killed his friend —through her.

She, who would have dragged herself through seas of blood to save him from pang or shame, had brought this guilt upon her head : that was all she understood. For her Maryx had died. For her Hilarion was a murderer. This was all she knew. A sense of overwhelming and ineffaceable guilt fell upon her : she shrank away, ashamed and afraid, from the light of the day.

Of him I heard nothing save that he had not attempted to escape from whatever the laws of his fellows might do to him ; that I heard. Justice ! I laughed aloud as I heard. What could bring back the dead from the sepulchre ? What could light again the divine fires of the genius he had quenched ?

Justice !

Then I understood how men could grow cruel. Had his doom been in my hands, I would have

made every breath a pang to him such as Dante himself never conceived in hell.

There is no justice upon earth : and hardly any vengeance. When we are young we hope for both ; but we wait and wait, and we grow old, and death comes, but on justice we never have looked. Death makes all men equal, say the preachers. Oh, terrible irony ! Equal lie the the murdered and the murderer.

Once more, and for ever, the sword and the clue of Athene dropped from her weary hands. Art ceased to exist to her ; from the sight of the whiteness of marble she shrank as from the sight of a murdered creature ; from the calm changeless eyes of the statues she fled as from the gaze of an avenging god.

She was innocent : yet the Erinnys pursued her, and night and day she had no rest. With each hot month of the summer the spirit within her seemed to faint more and more, and her body grew weaker and weaker, till at length she could not rise, but lay there still and mute as the young angels that lie on the tombs with folded hands and their wings drooped, waiting—

“ Could I but suffer for him ! ” she said once ; and it was still the living man that she meant. The dead was at rest ; but he—

I dared not say to her the thing I thought : that he suffered nothing, he who had slain men before this and only called it honour.

She lay there, I say, in the solitude of her chamber, and at last could not rise or move at all, and only saw the blue skies, and the changes of sun and of stars, through the high-arched casements barred with iron, with the blue veronica flowers hanging down them, and past them the pigeons flying.

The wise men said she should go from Rome, but that she would not do. Rome was to her as the mother in whose arms she would fain breathe her last.

From the height of her chamber even as she lay she could see the whole width of the city outspread, and the long dark lines of the pines on the hills, and the light which told where the sea was. She would lie and look, as the dying child looks at its mother’s face.

No one said she was dying ; they said it was

weakness, and the hot heavy air of the summer. But I knew it, and Amphion, and Ersilia, whose fierce eyes clouded with the rush of tears whenever she looked upon her.

Whether she knew it herself I cannot tell ; she had so little thought of herself. All her life had passed away to the dead in his grave and the living man with his sin. If she could have gone to Hilarion, I think she would still have found strength to live.

Out in the world of men, fame awaited her, for the myriad tongues of it made her their theme ; and because her laurel had grown out of passion and death, the world spoke but the more of it, and was ready to crown as its reigning caprice this woman of so much loveliness and so much genius who had been so faithlessly forsaken and so fatally beloved.

But the world called in vain.

As well might the Satyrs and Sileni have tried to wake Ariadnè, dead on the shore, with the shaft in her breast.

Men came to me, great men and other men whose trade it was to chaffer in the works of

genius ; and they all told the same tale ; and the trumpets of Fame were blowing loud in her honour yonder over the mountains, and Rome itself began to wake and say, “ What daughter of mine is this that has the ancient strength and the ancient grace in her ? ”

But I heard them, and bade them go their ways.

They came too late.

The trumpets of Fame sounded but as the empty hooting of the gnats ; the voice of Rome was as the voice of Niobe calling in vain.

“ You come too late,” I said to them ; and my eyes were dry and my brain was calm ; for the gods had done their worst, and the earth might as well have perished for aught that it held for me.

The summer wore away ; the desert winds blew hotly, filled with sand, and driving it ; and bringing the pestilence from the reedy swamps and the feebleness of slow sickness from the shallows of the river.

The vastness of Rome lay under the sun like a graveyard : Death had been digging there.

three thousand years, and had yet not done his labours.

The sky was like a brazen vessel, and the feet of the few passing people sounded always like the steps of muffled mourners burying their dead. By night in the white streets there seemed to be no other thing than the masked men and the torches and the dead.

It was not a sicklier season than any other, they said ; but thus it seemed ever to me, and the noise of the fountains lost all melody to my ears, and sounded only a dull hollow murmur, as of a sea that could never wash out the crimes of the blood-stained earth.

I wandered stupidly to and fro, and nearly always, day and night, sat on the threshold of her door, the dog beside me.

I could do her no good.

It is hard to suffer oneself ; but not to be able to spare from suffering what we love—that is worse. She was almost always silent. Silence seemed to have fallen on her like a spell. From the night when Giulio had told her the hideous truth she had scarcely spoken, save once or twice,

when she had cried out that she would go to him, by whom this death had come.

She grew stiller and stiller, whiter and whiter, day by day ; nothing seemed alive in her save her great, lovely, lustrous eyes ; her limbs lay motionless. At times I used to think that she was changing into the marble she had loved so much. At times I grew foolish and mad, and would go to the place where Hermes stood and call aloud to him to help her—he who had made women out of sport.

But neither from Hermes nor from any other god could any help come.

One day she broke her silence and said to me, “ How long shall I live ? ”

I broke down and wept.

“ As long as God wills ! ” I answered her, as any other would have done, since we are used to speak so—we who know nothing—

“ But I am near death ? ”

“ Oh, my dear ! oh, my love ! We cannot tell ! ”

“ I can tell,” she said slowly ; then, for the first time since that awful night when she had

heard of the death of Maryx, the large tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her wasted cheeks.

“I thought to make him hear the nightingales,” she said; and then her eyes closed and she was dumb once more.

She had thought that through her only the angels of the spring would fill his life, and she had brought him instead the curse of crime!

I kneeled down and kissed her slender hands, which had had strength to call out such noble shapes from the dull stone, and make it speak to men.

“Oh, my dear, you are innocent as the children unborn,” I murmured. “How could you make him hear, when he loved best the laughter of devils!”

She sighed wearily and shook her head, her eyes and her lips were still closed. In her own sight she was guilty; guilty of having missed the way to hold his soul and keep it.

She had given all her life, but it had not been enough; it had not sufficed to hold his heart to hers one moment. With all her force she had

striven ; but evil had been stronger than she ; it had beaten her, and when she had cried to the gods, they had been silent.

For what can be stronger than vileness, and of what avail is love ?

I went out from her chamber and into the drouth and drought of the air. No rain had fallen for many weeks, and the wind was full of hot sand, and the air was full of the hissing and hooting of stinging things. The wise men on the threshold said to me “ indeed, indeed, there is no disease, none at all that we can see.”

And I seemed no doubt to be mad to them, for I said, in reply :

“ Nay, nay, the laurel was set in her breast, and that kills, when the breast is a woman’s. If not the temple of Lubentina,—then death. And the temple she would not enter. Were she vile she were living now, living and laughing and laughing loud ! ”

And I went and wandered the streets, and the dog followed me spiritless and sorrowful, and as we passed by the Greek lad, he said to me :

“ In the verse that she once read to me they

threw in the flames what they loved the best—see, I have broken my flute and burnt it. Will that please the gods she told me of? will they be appeased? will they save her?"

Ah, heaven! since ever the world began, men and women have been burning their treasures in vain, and never has any answer come.

It was a parching, sultry, misty day, with no sunshine, but a heavy heat everywhere; I wandered into the woods of Borghese, and into the halls and chambers of the sculpture, and stood before the Ariadnē. It seemed so cruel;—there was the bronze head, beautiful and strong, with the ivy leaves around it, and there it would stay no doubt century after century, in the light there, while she, its living likeness, would perish as a flower perishes plucked before its time.

Mine had been only a dream; nothing but a dream; and she had to die for that.

It seemed to me as if the lips of the lovely Thespian Love parted, and moved, and said, "For a great love the earth is too narrow; and where I am not, Death is kind."

I sat down in the Cæsar Gallery, and leaned

my tired forehead on my hands, and wished that I had never wakened from my sleep that summer morning when the gods had spoken in my dream.

The place was solitary, and not a soul was near ; the day was waning ; through the iron bars of the casements the turf, burnt yellow by the sun, looked full of glare against the black dense shadows of the ilex leaves ; the insects hooting in the branches sounded like the mocking of the fates ; the bloated bestial emperors seemed to leer like living things. I thought the imperial wanton in her high chamber up above was surely laughing.

Aye, indeed, it must seem strange to harlots that a woman can so love that death is sweeter to her than fame or gold or homage, or the world of men, or any consolations of the senses and the vanities of life ; it must seem strange, for what should faithless women know of Love, they who worship those poor base gods, Apâte and Philotes ?

I leaned my head upon my hands, and shut out from my sight the grey and sickly day ; pestilence was abroad in all those amber and brown glades of the scorched woods, and all

that purple darkness of sweet shade: but that did not matter to me; it would harm me no more than it would harm the infant Herakles smiling in his lion's skin: when life is no longer a desire to us, it will stay with us faithfully.

I sat and thought, not of the bronzes or the marbles, but of the man who had come to me there, on that day of my dream, with the sunlight shining in his brave brown eyes, and smiling said: "still before your Ariadnē? And if it be an Ariadnē, who cares for her? she could be consoled."

But this my Ariadnē had refused all consolation, and he—the man to whom Fortune had been good for five and twenty years—was dead.

I sat weary and stupid in the grey sultry air, before the feet of the white Dionysos, thinking only of the great life that had gone out like the flame of a lamp, and of the young life that was fading slowly, dying as the summer died, unreconciled and unconsoled, though the hoary Silenus of the world had brought her the foaming wine of fame, and the god that is art had descended to her.

I felt weary and stupid: a step came to me

over the marble floor; I looked up, and it would not have seemed to me strange to have seen the gods arise, as I had seen them in my dream. I looked up, and I saw Hilarion.

How can I tell what I felt?

I put out my hands and thrust at the mere air, as on impulse one would do seeing some deadly shape in the darkness. He stood between me and the bronze Ariadnê.

The strange colours of the light, yellow and grey and weird, fell upon his face: I raised my voice to curse him, to curse him in his uprising and his downlying, in his present and his future, in life and in death, as men of old cursed what they abhorred. But something in his face stopped me, and froze the torrent on my lips: it was the face of a man on whom every curse of God and men had already fallen. It was the face of one who had killed his best friend: those who have looked on the like can understand—no other can.

He stood erect, and his old proud grace was unchanged, because it was in him as it was in the statues around, but his beauty was like the bruised, faded, worn beauty of a marble that has been

subject to every storm and scorch of weather through long years, and his eyes had the piteous beseeching humiliation of a man vanquished and loathsome to himself.

I could not curse him then; no more than I could have struck a wounded prisoner whose hands were fettered: there was that on his face which told me that the woman in the crowd had been right, when she had pitied him more than the man he had slain.

He spoke first, and his voice had lost all its accustomed melody, and sounded faint, yet harsh.

“Say nothing to me,” he muttered. “You can say nothing that I have not heard night and day, ever since, in the air, all around. Say nothing—tell me where she is?”

I was silent: to me it was so horrible to be face to face with him, that he enchain'd me only by his gaze, as they say that some great snakes do. And he was so changed! Great God, so changed! as the white Dionysos would have been, dragged through flame and carnage and the smoke of war.

He spoke again.

“I came as soon as I was free. Where is she ?”

“What is she to you ?” I said. “You never loved her !”

My mouth felt dry as if drink had not passed my lips for days ; I could scarcely shape my words to cast his own against him.

“I never loved her ; no ! The greater my curse.”

His voice was faint, and had a strange sound in it. In his eyes there was a look that woke a bitter pity in me,—pity I thrust away as vilest wrong to Maryx and to her. I mastered it.

“Go you your ways,” I said to him. “You have done nothing that will make you unfit for your great world ; nothing against honour or the codes of men. Go. The dead are dead. Women will not love you less ; nor men less feast you. Nay, you will have a charm the more for both. To me you are a murderer, but not to them. I am an ignorant man, and low and poor, and do not understand. Go—that is all I ask of you.”

He stood with his head bent patiently ; he was

humble before me as a slave before his master, he,—who had treated the world as a dog, and lashed it and kicked it, and had had it fawn on him the more, for all his careless and audacious insolence.

“ You must say what you choose,” he muttered. “ It is waste of words. You cannot say to me what I have not merited. I have taken a life that was beside my own, as Christ’s beside a Satyr’s!—”

His face had a strange convulsion on it; the blood seemed to burn on his brow, and leave his lips an ashen white; he put his hand to his throat as though some other hand were there and choking him.

“ Go and forget,” I said to him. “ It has been your boast—you have no memories, you do not choose to have; you have mocked at poor illiterate fools who spoke of regret or conscience. Go; write a poem on it; you have often said the poet should use the sufferings of others for his lamp, as, southward, they kill fireflies to read with: that is all.”

“ You are cruel,” he said simply, and with his

old cold accent; but he stood patiently; even in my loathing of him some shame of myself stirred in me; I had struck a wounded man, and one who was at my mercy.

“ Go! why will you not go? ” I cried to him furiously. “ Why come here to insult their graves? Is the world not wide enough that you must drag your crimes to Rome? Rome loved him, leave him alone to her. Go, I say. You are soulless enough, as the world sees,—your world,—nay, you will seduce women all the easier for that blood upon your hand. Most women are but beasts of prey, and love the smell of carnage. I am cruel? How many have cried that out against you, and when have you ever hearkened? What was your pity, ever? What was a dead love to you? You cast your *porea præsentanea* after it, and buried it, and thought no more—except to smile. Why cannot you smile now? Be true to yourself. Nothing matters. You can make the world weep, you laughing all the while. Aye, you are right. His life was to yours as Christ’s to a Satyr’s: one day of his brought forth a harvest that all your barren years

can never show. He blessed the nations : you have cursed them. He loved : you betrayed. He lived for all mankind : you for the narrow kingdom of your senses. And you have killed him—*you*. But in a twelvemonth you will have forgotten—why will you stand there ? You will have forgotten : you will tell the world the story in sonorous verse—and then forget. Go, before I do worse to you ; I am old and would not offend heaven.”

He stood quite silent—silent and patient, and with the discoloured paleness as of bruised marble on his face. Then suddenly he put out his hands with a pathetic gesture, almost like a timid child’s, and a great sob heaved his breast.

“ Have some mercy. Do you not see ?—I suffer ! ”

There was silence between us.

I understood that he did suffer, passing all power of man to make him suffer more.

A compassion that I could no longer combat stole into me. Ah, if Maryx, lying in his grave, could have seen into my soul, he would not have

been angered ; he would have pitied his murderer too.

There was stillness between us.

He leaned one hand on the pedestal of the Dionysos, and stood with his head and shoulders bowed so that I could not see his face.

The day was declining ; the shadows were growing dark : they began to veil the bronze of the Ariadnê.

“ Where is she ? ” he said suddenly.

“ What matter to you ? ” I said to him.

“ Can you not understand ? ” he said, and his laboured breath seemed to choke him as he spoke. “ If she do not shrink from me—if I do not appal her—what atonement I can make I will. I never loved her—no. He did ; as no other man could have done. I never loved her ; but her message in the marble—that I understood. She loves me : no other woman could ever love like that. If she do not shrink from me, what I can do I will. What honour, what peace, what amends I can render her I will give. Beside her innocence, her holiness, I am vile indeed ; but since

she clings to me thus, I shall have power to console.”

I made him no answer.

It seemed to me as if all the devils of hell swarmed in the beautiful marble chamber, and jibed and laughed and mocked around us, crying, “All things come too late !”

I looked up at him. The day was at an end ; the dull red glow of a clouded sunset shone through the iron bars of the casement, and bathed the feet of the white sculptures as in a sea of blood.

“ You would do this ?”

He answered,

“ By his life and by his death I swear it—yes.”

I turned my face to the sunset and I said to him, “ Come !”

I went out of the halls and through the glades of the wood. He walked beside me. The bells of the city were tolling far the last hour of light. Around us were greyness and darkness.

Away in the great west that fronted us as we passed down into Rome was the glow of the sun that had sunk ; behind the dark trees of the

Vatican there were long low lines of tremulous luminance, and a vast field of pale, soft blue, and above it a deep flush like 'the awful rose of dawn.'

He closed his eyes as all its beauty met them. Never more could he look with calm gaze at all the lovely mysteries of the air, or watch with peace the glories of the sky.

We passed without a word through the entangled streets of the city.

At last we reached her threshold, and climbed the winding stair.

It was almost dark : they had lit one lamp. There was the cry of the owls in the dusk.

I opened her door. She lay quite still as I had left her ; the dim gold of her curls fell over the broad low brow that was the brow of Ariadnè ; her lips were slightly parted ; her eyes gazed at the western sky : where she looked, there was still a pale radiance and a flush left by the dead day.

I signed to him to enter.

He entered ; and looked.

"My God ! She is dying !" he called aloud,

with a cry that rang through all the lonely house.

She heard his voice, and sprang up on her narrow bed, and stretched her arms to him.

He sank on his knees beside her.

“ You can forgive ? ” he cried to her.

In answer her white and wasted arms stole about his throat, and her lips sought his.

“ Live, oh live ! ” he moaned as he knelt.

“ Live for me—I love you ! ”

And for the first time he told no lie.

She made him no answer, but her arms rested about his throat, and her cheek was against his own. For a few moments she lay thus; then with a little sigh she moved a little and lifted her tender weary eyes to his.

“ Forgive me—I missed the way ! ” she murmured faintly while her sight grew blind. Then her lips sought his once more, and on his own they trembled one moment longer, then grew cold and still.

He loved her—and she was dead.

L'ENVOI.

I sit by the fountain in the wall, and the water has no song for me. The years have gone by ; and I cease to count them. He lives and he cannot forget, and he loves what is dead. The world seems empty, and the skies are dark. All around me I hear the Satyrs laughing, the Satyrs who could not net the soul of Ariadnè. They blow on their pipes, and the mad world dances : yet all they sing is for ever but this :

“ All things come too late ! ”

THE END.

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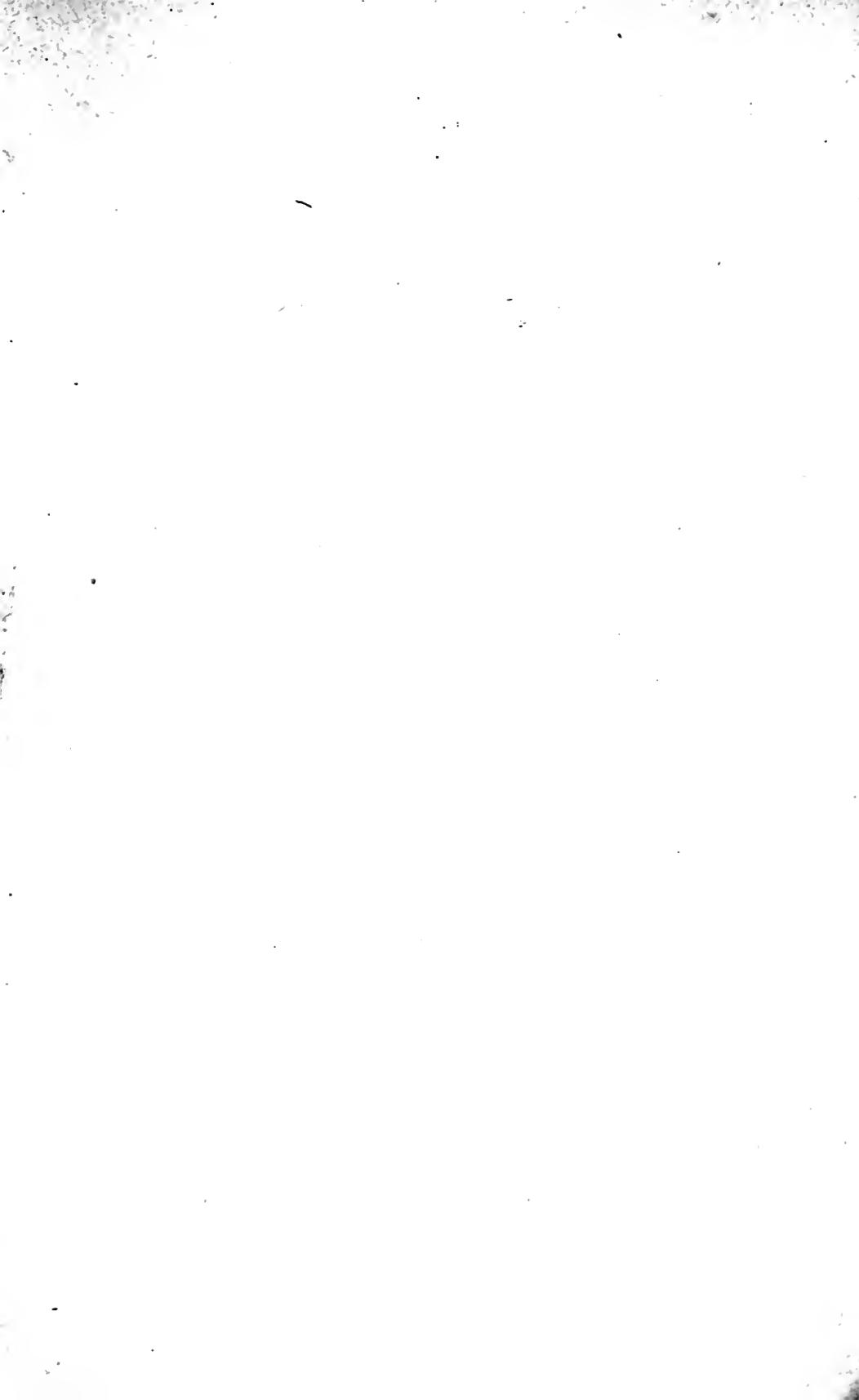
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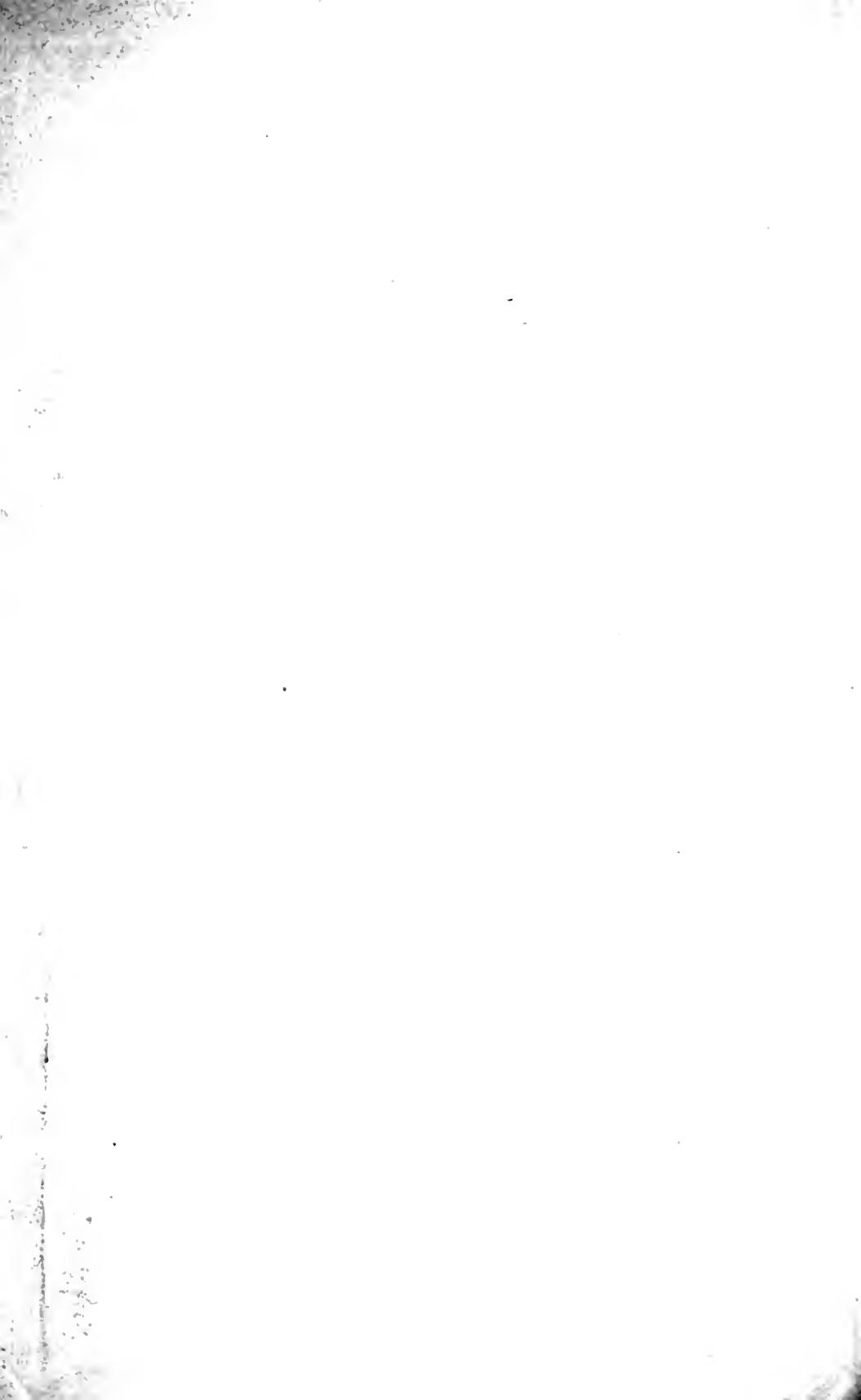
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